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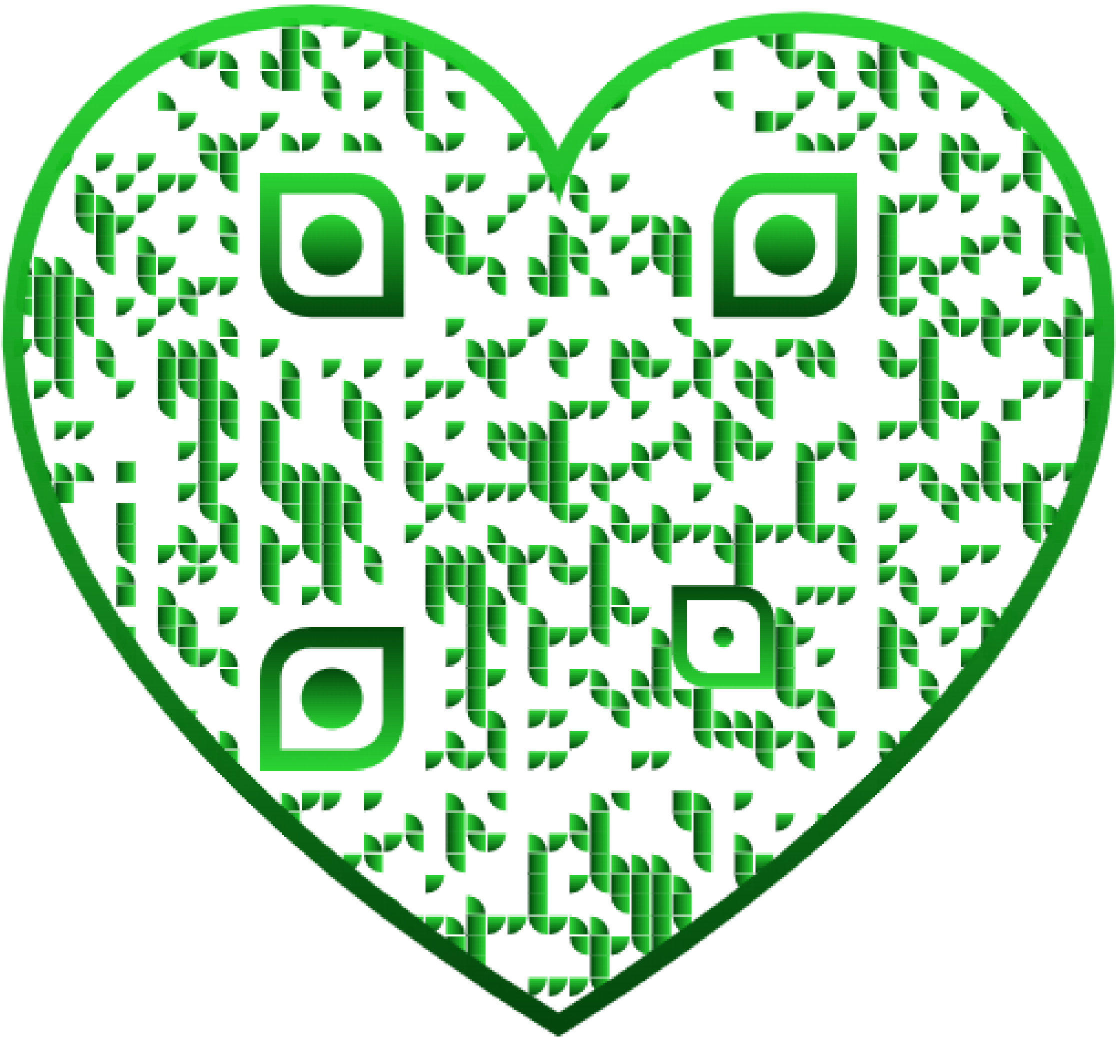

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On the final days of harrier ops for the squadron, the colour bird AV-8B Harrier II of VMA-231 'Ace of Spades' departs MCAS Cherry Point Tyler Hernandez

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On the cover

Tiger, Tiger, burning bright! The iconic lines of a Tiger Moth on final to Sywell caught against the burning orange skies of Northamptonshire at the end of the day's scholarship flying Nigel Harrison

Welcome

Halfway through the year – welcome to this edition of *Aviation News*. If you're a harrier fan (and who isn't?), it was an emotional time when one of two USMC units closed the curtain on its harrier operations, but we got the chance to visit the famous Ace of Spades squadron just before it hung its harrier boots up.

During the creation of this edition, we saw another conflict erupt in these uneasy times, between India and Pakistan, with the former launching Operation Sindhoor. It saw multiple IAF aircraft shot down, including a Dassault Rafale – the first loss of this type in combat. Apparently, it was downed by a PL-15 missile launched from a PAF J-10 fighter. Was this a victory for Eastern hardware over Western hardware? Meanwhile, Ukraine is due more F-16s from the Netherlands as the final two departed Volkel for the front line on May 26. We discussed this with the commander of the RNLAF Lt Gen Andre Steur, talking about getting jets ready for a second life while building up a fifth-generation fighter force with the F-35A – it's some work and some achievement.

May also saw another major achievement: UK start-up airline Global flew multiple transatlantic flights with passengers aboard its sole A380; what is next for founder James Asquith and his team… and will it be a success? Aren't we all asking the same questions? In other commercial news, Wizz Air received its maiden A321XLR, and East Midlands Airport saw the arrival of Yun Express 777F freighter aircraft as the airport began a major deal with the Chinese cargo operator; a great win for the status of EMA.

Our cover story is truly amazing: the father of the late Thomas Castle, Ian Castle has set up a fantastic tribute to his son – Thomas's legacy aims to keep alive his love for vintage aviation within the younger generation.

We also head to the NATO border in Latvia to fly with RCAF Griffons providing air support to the multinational brigade on the ground; we discuss profit strategies with Gulf Carrier, Oman Air's CEO; and we see some fabulous imagery from the Caribbean Island of Curacao. Talking of fabulous imagery, check out this month's centrespread!

A final note, if anyone is heading to any shows this summer and would fancy a cuppa with the editor, feel free to let me know and I will see where I plan to be over the beautiful sunny (hopefully!) summer months.

Joe

Joe Campion, Editor

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Main image : **A Lufthansa MD-11F touches down on the tarmac. The MD-11F was in service with Lufthansa Cargo between 1998 and 2021, and eventually replaced by the 777F** Jose Salgueiro

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We go behind the scenes with a Tactical Aviation Detachment of the RCAF as it supports troops on the ground on the NATO border.

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For those with Questions

THE UK'S newest carrier, Global Airlines, completed its inaugural passenger flights in May, with a pair of return services to New York/JFK from Glasgow and Manchester. These services were operated on its behalf by ACMI specialist Hi Fly Malta using the start-up's sole Airbus A380-841, registered 9H-GLOBL (c/n 120).

After positioning into Glasgow from Beja, Portugal, on May 13, the inaugural passenger service departed the Scottish city at 11.30am on May 15, with 95 passengers on board. Initially cruising at 38,000ft, the aircraft later levelled off at 40,000ft as it crossed northern Canada. Approximately six hours and 20 minutes after departure, flight HFM380 touched down on JFK's runway 22L.

The return flight to Glasgow operated four days later on May 19. Passengers on flight HFM381 enjoyed an upgrade from previous remote-stand boardings, using a jet bridge from Terminal 4 at JFK – a rare luxury given the limited availability of A380-compatible gates. Departing JFK around an hour late at 9am, the aircraft climbed initially to 39,000ft. A brief step climb to 41,000ft followed, before returning to 39,000ft for the remainder of the flight. The six-hour return journey concluded with a landing on runway 05 at Glasgow.

Online discourse was lively following the inaugural flights, focusing mainly on the service provided, cabin configuration and the relatively low passenger numbers. Our sister magazine, *Airliner World* joined Global's second New York service, departing from Manchester on May 21. The A380 repositioned to the northwest hub, landing shortly after 10am ahead of its scheduled 12.25pm departure.

Flight HFM382 – with 86 passengers – took off just after 1pm, climbing first to 39,000ft and later to 40,000ft on its second transatlantic crossing. During the cruise, Global Airlines founder and CEO James Asquith spoke with *Airliner World* about the purpose behind the inaugural flights: "To stop answering the question 'when's our first transatlantic flights?' most importantly," he said. "I'm serious, I've been asked that for years. It's also important to prove the product, get the feedback on the product, see where we can improve and show it can be done."

GLOBAL
9H-GLOBL
A380-800

Mohammad Bilal

China Airlines signs up for 777X

TAIWAN-BASED CHINA Airlines has become the latest carrier to sign up for the Boeing 777X, putting pen to paper on a deal for ten 777-9s. It has also ordered four 777-8F freighters, making it only the third airline to commit to both passenger and cargo models, following All Nippon Airways and Qatar Airways. The carrier has also secured options for a further five 777-9s and four 777-8Fs.

Kao Shing-Hwang, China Airlines' chairman, said: "This is a significant investment toward our future and we will rely on the new 777X family to help realise our long-term sustainability goals. As a long-time operator of the 777-300ER and 777 Freighter, we are excited to welcome Boeing's newest 777X family into our world-class fleet."

Boeing has disclosed that China Airlines' 777-9s will be configured in a two-class, 426-seat cabin. However, it has not stated how the interior will be split between business and economy. Once delivered, the airline intends to place the widebodies on rotations between its Taipei/Taoyuan base and destinations in Europe and North America.

CARGO
CHINA AIRLINES

Boeing

The 777-9 is the world's largest twin-engine jet and Boeing states that, once in service, it will offer 20% lower fuel use and emissions than the aircraft it is replacing. It boasts a range of 7,295nm, while the smaller 777-8F offers a 747-sized payload capacity with a 30% improvement in fuel efficiency compared with the 747-400F.

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*One child under the age of five dies from malaria in the WHO Africa Region every 73 seconds. WHO World Malaria Report 2024, Page 12

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IAG goes widebody shopping

INTERNATIONAL CONSOLIDATED Airlines Group (IAG) disclosed a major order in its first quarter financial results set to shape the future of its long-haul offering. The order, comprising 71 jets from Airbus and Boeing, came on May 9, just a day after the UK and US announced a new trade deal.

The consortium confirmed it had exercised options for six A350-900s, six A350-1000s and six Boeing 777-9s in March, while also announcing it had ordered 32 Boeing 787-10 Dreamliners and 21 A330-900s. As part of the respective Boeing and Airbus deals, IAG secured options for a further ten 787s and 13 A330neos, respectively.

While there has been scant detail about the acquisitions, it's likely that the GE Aviation GEnx-powered 787-10s will join British Airways (BA). The Heathrow-based carrier still fields 43 777-200ERs, which have an average age of 25.2 years, while the oldest, G-VIIA (c/n 27483), is 28.6 years old. The Airbus A350-900s are expected to join Iberia, which already operates 21 of the XWB variant, while the larger -1000s could supplement those already flown by BA.

The 21 A330-900s – the most interesting aspect of the order – are likely to form the backbone of a long-haul fleet renewal at Aer Lingus. The Irish carrier flies 13 A330ceos, some of which are as old as 23 and 24. Iberia, with 27 A330s, and LEVEL, with seven of the widebody jets, will also be in contention to recive some of the 21 Rolls-Royce Trent 7000-powered twin-aisle airliners.

BRITISH AIRWAYS
STS
STS

Lee Spencer

Easy expansion

EASYJET WILL open a three-aircraft base at Newcastle Airport in March next year. The airline already offers eight routes from the Tyneside gateway to Alicante, Amsterdam, Belfast, Bristol, Geneva, Malaga, Palma de Mallorca and Paris. Kenton Jarvis, easyJet CEO, said: "This not only consolidates our position as the UK's largest leisure airline, but will create many skilled jobs and provide critical connectivity for the region, playing an important role in enabling vital economic growth for the UK."

The airline reopened its bases at Birmingham last year and at Southend in March, so the addition of Newcastle will increase its number of UK bases to 11. So far this year, the airline has already added 11 aircraft to its UK fleet. Nick Jones, chief executive at Newcastle Airport, added: "This investment will not only offer greater connectivity with the launch of new routes, but it will also deliver hundreds of thousands of additional low-cost seats and package holidays for our passengers, as well as a significant boost to the local economy by creating high-quality jobs, and attract more inbound visitors to the region."

easyJet
easyJet

easyJet

In other news, easyJet is to open an additional maintenance hangar at its London/Luton home in a boost for jobs at the airport. The new facility will open in 2026 and create more than 30 new engineering and maintenance positions. It joins the airline's existing engineering hangar facilities at Luton, London/Gatwick and Liverpool.

Terminal transformations

Manchester Airport Group

MANCHESTER AIRPORT has announced a new multi-million pound project to revamp its smallest terminal, Terminal 3 (T3). The move is part of a larger transformation project begun in 2015 that involves Terminal 2 doubling in size and the closure of Terminal 1.

The project includes the remodelling of the terminal's entrance, security hall and departure lounge, which will create more space for passengers and retailers alike. A new 500-seat bar with airfield views is planned, along with additional shops and food and beverage outlets both landside and airside, while an expanded dining area with an extra 200 seats is planned post-security. The airport also said that the look and feel of the terminal – opened by Princess Diana in 1989 – will be updated.

The closure of Terminal 1 – which is adjacent and connected to Terminal 3 – will also enable T3 to increase its footprint, adding 40% more seating in departure lounges as well as enabling the airport to roll out new security equipment.

The announcement's timing comes as the second phase of the £1.3bn Manchester Airport Transformation Programme – a second pier extending from the original Terminal 2 building – is due for completion later this year. It will allow more than 20 new retailers, bars and restaurants to open, while increasing the facility's capacity to handle 70% of all passengers flying from the hub.

Chris Woodroofe, Manchester Airport MD, said: "We are proud to connect the people of the north to the world and our transformation programme means that our passengers will be able to enjoy an airport experience that rivals that of any European capital city. The work we've done in Terminal 2 is there for all to see and we've already won the prestigious Prix Versailles for its architecture and design, but until now we haven't talked about our plans for Terminal 3.

"Moving to a two-terminal airport is giving us a great opportunity to use some of the existing Terminal 1 space to increase the footprint of T3. We're doing that as well as making some all-round improvements to T3, so passengers will enjoy new security technology, more space, more seats, new retail and food and drink outlets and more. It's another exciting step towards delivering an even better experience for our passengers and I can't wait to see it progress."

Royal Jordanian A320NEO

On May 28, Avolon announced that it had delivered the first of eight Airbus A320NEOs it is leasing to Royal Jordanian Airlines. The remaining 7 are due to be delivered of the next 12 months. Royal Jordanian's first A320neo is configured with an 180-seat, all-economy layout, designed for customer comfort and efficient operations across its regional network. Future deliveries will feature a variety of cabin configurations, from all-economy to premium layouts including lieflat beds on the A321neos.

Royal Jordanian currently operates a fleet of 24 aircraft flying to 50 destinations and is planning to grow its fleet to 41 aircraft by 2028. Avolon and Royal Jordanian are long-standing partners and these A320neo family deliveries add to the two Boeing 787-8s that Avolon already has on lease to the airline.

Avolon
ROYAL JORDANIAN
1st A320neo

One billion and counting

Boeing

BOEING'S 787 Dreamliner has carried more than one billion passengers since entering service, achieving the milestone faster than any other commercial widebody in history. The feat comes less than 14 years after the type's first delivery. The global 787 fleet, comprising more than 1,175 aircraft, has completed nearly five million flights and logged more than 30 million flight hours since its debut.

Scott Stocker, Boeing 787 programme vice president and general manager, commented: "This milestone would not have been possible without the trust and confidence of our customers in operating the 787, and we are incredibly grateful for each of them. This achievement reflects the dedication, talent and innovation of the teammates and partners who have brought the 787 family to life. To every operator flying the 787 and every one of the one billion passengers who have flown on a Dreamliner, thank you."

Singapore 737NGs to be retired

Singapore Airlines Group

SINGAPORE AIRLINES (SIA) plans to retire its four remaining Boeing 737-800s by March 2026, in line with the delivery of five new 737 MAX 8s. The flag carrier also expects to add two Boeing 787-10s to its fleet over the same period, with no further changes anticipated.

SIA subsidiary Scoot is set for a more extensive fleet refresh. By the end of March 2026, it expects to take delivery of 15 aircraft, comprising two Boeing 787-8s, one 787-9, five Airbus A320neos, three A321neos and four Embraer E190-E2s. Five A320ceos will be retired as part of this transition.

These fleet developments were outlined alongside the group's full-year financial results. Singapore Airlines reported a net profit of $2.8bn on revenues of $19.5bn – a 2.4% year-on-year increase – driven by what it described as "resilient demand for air travel and cargo uplift." Together, Singapore Airlines and Scoot carried a record 39.4 million passengers, up 8.1% on the previous year. However, the group's load factor slipped by 1.4 percentage points to 86.6%, as capacity growth of 8.2% outpaced a 6.4% rise in passenger traffic. The group also recorded a $1bn non-cash accounting gain from the merger of Air India and Vistara in November 2024, in which SIA held a stake. Total annual costs rose 9.5% to $17.8bn, led by an 11% increase in non-fuel expenses, which reached $12.4bn.

$96bn order placed by Qatar

Key/Ben Stanley Hall

QATAR AIRWAYS has announced an order for up to 210 Boeing widebodies in a deal worth $96bn. The contract is for 130 787 Dreamliners – the largest ever order for the type – as well as 30 777-9s and options for an additional 50 787s and 777Xs.

Qatar CEO Badr Mohammed Al Meer said the historic order was a critical step in the company's future, allowing it to meet the strong demand: "After two consecutive years of record-breaking commercial performance and with this historic Boeing aircraft order, we're not simply chasing scale. We're building strength that will allow us to continue to deliver our unmatched products and customer experiences."

The news comes as the Doha-based carrier unveiled full-year net profits of $2.1bn, an increase of 28% compared to the previous year, marking the strongest financial result in the airline's history. Its network capacity increased by 3.5%, which it claimed was down to operating its fleet "smarter and with greater efficiency." Meanwhile, the carrier's cargo division recorded a 17% growth in revenue, achieving its best financial results since the COVID-19 pandemic.

EMA lands major freight deal

Central Airlines
YunExpress

Lee Spencer

EAST MIDLANDS Airport has landed a major deal with Chinese cargo operators. YunExpress, a Chinese logistics firm based out of Hainan, first landed at EMA on May 13 with one of its 777F freighter aircraft – the first of its kind to any UK airport. The flights are operated in partnership with Central Airlines. This deal underlines East Midlands status as the UK's number one express air freight hub. The flights will operate twice a week, with plans to increase the frequency.

East Midlands Airport's managing director, Steve Griffiths, said: "I'm delighted we have landed this deal with Central Airlines and YunExpress, the first Chinese cargo operators here, making us the first UK airport to take their flights. These new operators are a major coup for the airport and point to our status as the UK's best-placed airport for the ongoing growth in express air cargo. While there are constraints at many other airports, we have capacity for more cargo flights, can operate 24/7 and can quickly get goods from aircraft to anywhere in the UK."

Wizz Air receives maiden XLR

wizz
XLR
wizzair.com
1st A321XLR

Key/Robert Veitch

WIZZ AIR has finally got its hands on the first of its 47 Airbus A321XLRs in a handover at the manufacturer's Hamburg/Finkenwerder facility on May 20. As well as being the airline's first XLR and the first of the type to be based in the UK, it is also the first XLR delivered to a low-cost carrier and the first powered by Pratt & Whitney GTF engines. The aircraft, G-XLRA (c/n 11631), is the first of two that will be based at London/Gatwick, with the second, G-XLRB (c/n 12437), due for delivery in mid-2025.

Speaking at the ceremony, Owain Jones, Wizz Air's chief corporate officer, said: "The arrival of our first A321XLR is a defining moment for Wizz Air and our passengers. This aircraft is one of the great results of our two decade-long successful co-operation with Airbus that has revolutionised air travel, enabling us to offer non-stop intercontinental routes at unbeatable prices while maintaining our commitment to efficiency and sustainability."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Croatia Airlines welcomed the third Airbus A220-300 into its fleet during May. Unlike its first two, which came from Air Lease Corporation, 9A-CAL (c/n 55350) has been supplied on lease from Azorra Aviation. Configured to seat 150 passengers in a single-class layout, the narrowbody is the first of three due from Azorra. A total of 15 A220s are expected to be delivered to the airline by the end of 2027.

Guernsey-based **Blue Islands** has taken delivery of its first ATR 72-600. The ten-year-old ex-Avianca Guatemala turboprop, G-ISLP (c/n 1167), was handed over on May 15 and is being leased from Florida-based Jetstream Aviation Capital. Configured with 72 seats, the aircraft had yet to enter service at the time of writing. It joins four other ATR 72-500s in the fleet.

One Air has begun recruiting Boeing 777 pilots ahead of the arrival of its first factory-fresh twinjet. The all-747 operator is preparing to introduce a pair of Boeing 777Fs, with the first expected to be registered G-ONEG (c/n 68454). The airline currently flies three 747-400 freighters including two -433BDSFs and one -428ERF.

United Airlines touched down in Faro for the first time on May 17, signalling the launch of a new seasonal service from New York/Newark. The route will be flown four times per week and operated by one of the carrier's Boeing 757-200s. The airline began serving Lisbon, Portugal, from New York in 1997 and now has seven routes to Portugal across five destinations.

China Airlines took delivery of its tenth Boeing 777F on May 16. The arrival of B-18779 (c/n 68060) concludes the carrier's outstanding delivery allocation for the type, which it began accepting in 2020.

Operation Spider's Web

JUST AS Russia's largest-ever drone attack against Ukraine had finished on June 1, Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) launched a well-planned secret drone operation aimed at destroying Russia's Long-Range Aviation (LRA).

Operation Spider's Web aimed to cause as much destruction as possible on the strategic bomber fleet of the Russian Aerospace Forces (RuAF) tasked with delivering long-range conventional and nuclear air strikes.

While the consequences of this operation were yet to be determined as *Aviation News* went to press, from initial reports it was clear five RuAF air bases (AB) were targeted – Belaya AB (Irkutsk Oblast), Dyagilevo AB (Ryazan Oblast), Ivanovo AB (Ivanovo Oblast), Olenya AB (Murmansk Oblast) and Ukrainka AB (Amur Oblast).

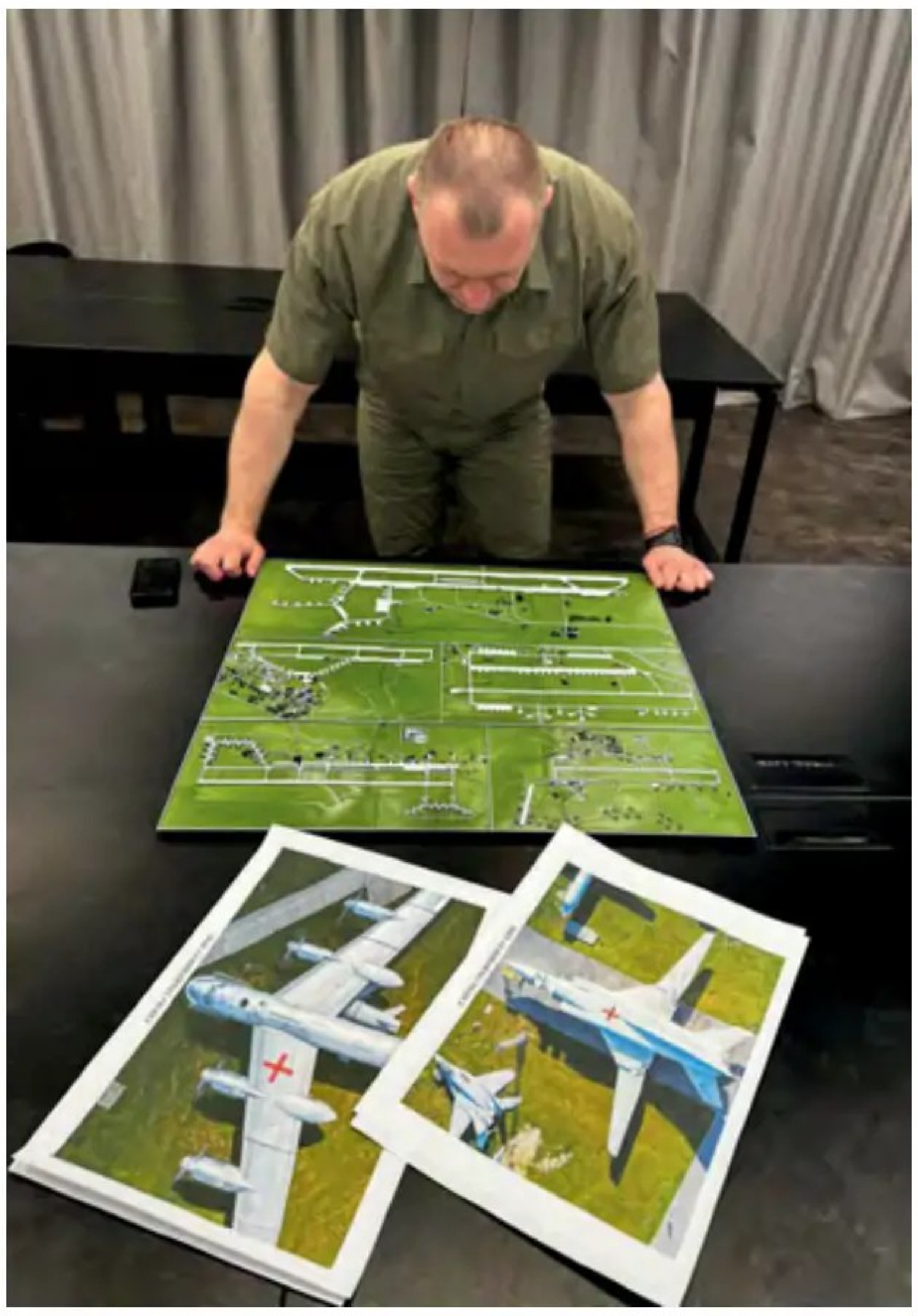
Apart from Ivanovo AB, the home to the RuAF's fleet of A-50 *Mainstay* airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) aircraft, the other four are home to LRA's fleet of some 110 Tu-22M3 *Backfire-C* and Tu-95MS *Bear-H* strategic bombers, regularly involved in deploying air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs) against Ukraine.

This unconventional operation, 18 months in the making, involved the launch of swarms of so-called first person view (FPV) drones that are controlled by a human operator, hidden inside containers within trucks parked near the intended target. This not only assured total surprise, but also prevented intervention of ground-based air defence (GBAD) assets, due to their number and small size.

According to the SBU, 34% of the LRA fleet (which is no more than 130 aircraft, including the Tu-160 *Blackjack*) was destroyed or damaged in the process – the loss being estimated at US$7bn. Unofficial sources suggest that more than 40 various aircraft were struck. A few videos have been leaked – confirming that two Tu-22M3s and one Tu-95MS were hit at Belaya AB, plus three Tu-95MS bombers and an An-12 *Cub* transport at Olenya AB.

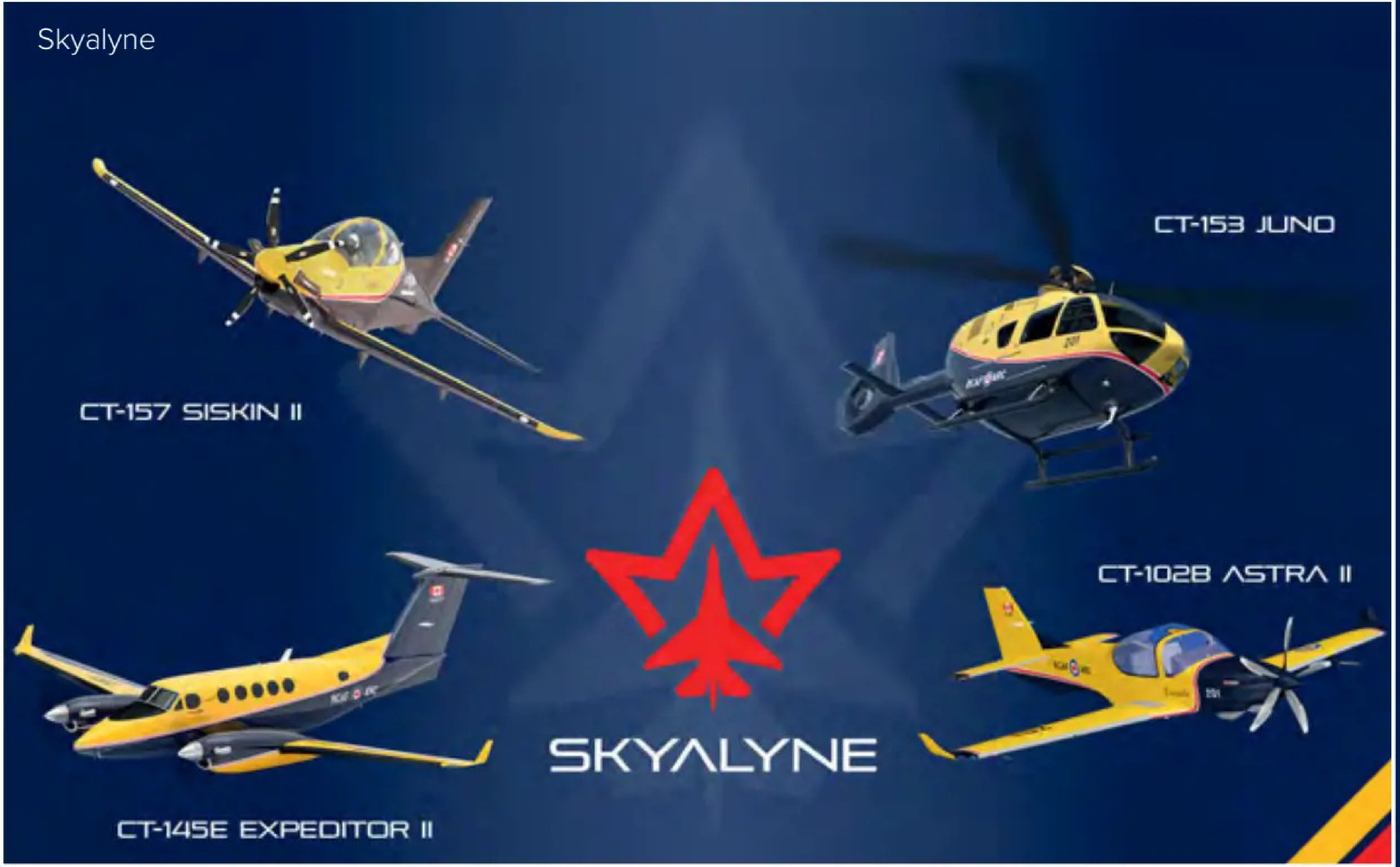
The Russian MoD confirmed that all five air bases were attacked by FPV drones, acknowledging only that 'several aircraft were set on fire' at Belaya and Olenya. Regardless of the operation's final tally, which has yet to be verified, this day will surely go down in the books as a 'black day' for the RuAF's LRA.

Vladimir Trendafilovski



SBU's chief Lt Gen Vasyl Malyuk looks at plans of the five RuAF Air Bases that were targeted as part of Operation Spider's Web – Olenya AB, Dyagilevo AB, Ivanovo AB, Belaya AB and Ukrainka AB (from top to bottom, left to right) and close-ups of the Tu-95MS (bottom left) and Tu-22M3 bombers SBU

Canada's new training fleet


Skyalyne

THE COMMANDER of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), Lt Gen Eric Kenny has released details of the paint schemes and names for the new aircraft that will serve the RCAF on the Future Aircrew Training (FAcT) programme.

The fleet of FAcT aircraft will boast the 'Reflect Forward' livery, which will be half yellow to reflect the historical 'training yellow' of the Commonwealth Air Training Plan aircraft between 1940-1945, and also dark blue – the colour of today's training aircraft. A red and white line can be seen, symbolising Canada's national flag. The two-tone scheme has a practical reasoning; the colours make the airframes visible against a variety of terrains and skies in various weather conditions.

As well as revealing livery schemes, the names of the fleets were announced on May 28. Grob's G 120TP was designated the CT-102B Astra II. This fleet of 23 will be based at Moose Jaw Canadian Forces Base in Saskatchewan. Also at Moose Jaw will be a fleet of 19 Pilatus PC-21 aircraft, named the CT-157 Siskin II, named after the Armstrong Whitworth Siskin, known as Canada's first true fighter aircraft.

Training multi-engine aircrew will be a fleet of seven Beechcraft King Air 260s, titled CT-145E Expeditor II based at Southport in Manitoba. Joining the Expeditor II in Southport will be the rotary-wing training aircraft, 19 Airbus H135 helicopters are to be designated as the CT-153 Juno. Finally, located at Winnipeg will be three de Havilland Canada Dash 8-400s training air combat systems officers (ASCO) and airborne electronic sensor operators (AES OP). The Dash 8 will be titled the CT-142Q Citadel. Details of the Citadel's RCAF livery are yet to be released.

Aviation News

No more Strikes in the UK?

A plan to remove US Strike Eagles from RAF Lakenheath was discussed on May 20, during the hearing on the Posture of the Department of the Air Force in the Review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2026, held by the Senate Armed Services Committee. During the hearings, Chief of Staff of the Air Force General David W Allvin was questioned by Senator Theodore P Budd, about the Strike Eagles at Lakenheath in Suffolk, flown by the USAF 492nd and 494th Fighter Squadrons of the 48th Fighter Wing.

An air force report delivered to Congress in April had outlined its plan to sustain and recapitalise the fighter fleet, detailing how the service would do so up to 2035. Senator Budd said the plan is based on assumptions about the production and sustainment of the Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II over the next ten years. These would need to be correct for it to work.

Senator Budd asked: “One thing that stuck out to me was the arrival of the F-35s at Lakenheath air base and that once they are up and running, two Strike Eagle units will be returning Stateside. So has a decision been made on where those aircraft will end up?”

Gen Allvin replied: “The final decision hasn’t been made,” but he added that the Seymour Johnson Air Base in North Carolina was being considered because “those have the newer 229 engines in them, versus the 220 engine, so understanding Seymour Johnson has the 220 engines in them… we’re looking very closely at the opportunity.

“Seymour Johnson will be critical to the F-15E and ’EX community as far as the training unit and the operational unit for the ’E, so that certainly is an attractive landing spot right now. We haven’t made that final decision, but it’s pretty attractive.”

Senator Budd continued: “Seymour Johnson… houses both combat and training missions and is home to the oldest Strike Eagles in the fleet. So does the return of those Lakenheath jets create flexibility for managing the F-15E fleet and keeping those missions alive?”

General Allvin replied: “It absolutely does.”

Senator Budd: “So if you were able to divest those oldest jets, those with the Dash 220 jets at Seymour Johnson, unencumbered by the current law, and replace them with newer ones, does that make it easier to sustain both the combat and training missions at Seymour Johnson?”

General Allvin: “That absolutely does.”

Senator Budd: “I want to be supportive and if there are common sense decisions that are held up by technicalities or factors outside your control, I want to hear about it and I’m willing to work with you on that.”

In recent years, Congress has been reluctant to sanction retirements of combat aircraft without replacements. This is in response to the shrinking size of the USAF’s combat jet inventory, linked to delays in the delivery of F-35As due to the ongoing problems Lockheed Martin has experienced with the stealth aircraft. Deliveries of the aircraft were paused in the summer of 2023, due to software certification issues with the Technical Refresh 3 (TR-3) upgrade, but were lifted in July last year. However, these aircraft have not been cleared for combat operations. This had meant that older combat aircraft have had to be retained to maintain the size of the inventory.

The USAF’s wish to retire F-15Es powered by the less powerful F110-PW-220 first emerged in 2023. The service wanted to withdraw 119 aircraft from the then fleet of 218 Strike Eagles by Fiscal Year 2028. The retirement of 26 F-15Es (and 32 F-22A Raptors) was opposed by the House Armed Services Committee in the 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (NDDA). The NDDA stated it “would prohibit the retirement of any F-15E tactical fighter aircraft, with certain exceptions, until the secretary of defense submits a fighter aircraft capability and requirements study that estimates the number of fighter aircraft needed by the air force to meet the requirements of geographical combatant commanders”. It also stated that the defence secretary must brief Congress by December 31 this year and the secretary of the air force may not retire or store any F-15Es until a period of 180 days has elapsed after that date. No date has been given for the proposed relocation of the RAF Lakenheath aircraft, and it still needs to be approved. **David Willis Key.Aero**

Weapons update

The first firing of SPEAR 3 from a Typhoon was conducted in Sweden in October 2024 *MBDA*

REPLIES TO questions in the UK Parliament have provided an update on the continued development of new weapons for the RAF. The Brimstone 3 precision strike missile remains in the demonstration and manufacturing phase, with the first safe separation firing from a Typhoon expected this summer. The munition will be fielded in early 2026 and early 2027 on Protector RG1 and Typhoon FGR4 respectively.

Having test-fired an MBDA SPEAR 3 cruise missile from a BAE Systems-operated Typhoon for the first time in October 2024, further trials for SPEAR 3 are expected on the Vidsel range in Sweden this summer. Hardware has been delivered by manufacturer MBDA to Lockheed Martin in the US to support F-35B Lightning integration activity, including on aircraft flights also planned for summer 2025. However, the SPEAR 3 weapon programme is undergoing re-baselining and the estimated current timeline for in-service capability is expected to be the early 2030s.

Integration of the Meteor beyond-visual-range air-to-air missile (BVRAAM) onto the F-35 Lightning is progressing to plan. Initial Meteor midlife activities are also on track and due to report at the end of 2025. Progression to the next stage is subject to the six Meteor partner nations agreement expected later this year.

SkyFox lands in Hungary

Aero Vodochody

AERO VODOCHODY Aerospace delivered the first three Aero L-39NG Skyfox trainers to the Hungarian Air Force on May 30.

The new advanced training aircraft were handed over at Kecskemét Air Base, where the Czech company’s engineers and specialists will remain to provide support.

The contract for 12 L-39NGs, eight in training configuration and four in a reconnaissance configuration, was signed in April 2022. The contract included ground equipment, simulators and a training programme. Since 2022, three Hungarian pilots and 16 technicians have been trained by Aero via almost 100 training flights, including night and formation flying.

During the handover ceremony Dr Zsolt Kutnyánszky, State Secretary for Force Development and Defence Policy said: “The arrival of the first L-39NG Skyfox jet training aircraft not only means a new level in our combat flying capabilities but also reflects the decisive, dynamic and purposeful military development programme that we have launched and continue to carry through with consistency.

“As part of this advancement, we have established a state-of-the-art simulation centre – this facility will be unique in Hungary and even in our region. The latest training system and the L-39NG Skyfox aircraft will be integrated into the NATO Flight Training Europe programme, thereby strengthening the Alliance as well.”

Viktor Sotona, President and Chairman of the Board of Aero, said: “Today’s handover marks the culmination of our joint efforts and, at the same time, opens a new chapter and a long-term partnership.”

Delays for RAF Wedgetail

ROYAL AIR FORCE

RAF/Crown Copyright

PROGRESS ON the entry into RAF service of the Wedgetail AEW1 remains troubled, with the Ministry of Defence disclosing to our sister magazine *AirForces Monthly* that the full business case for the programme has still not been finalised. With no date set for its approval, the criteria for full operating capability remains up in the air. Delivery of the first Wedgetail AEW1 has been delayed to the end of 2025, with initial operational capability of the new airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) aircraft now anticipated in 2026.

The programme has been seeking a revision to its scheduled end date as challenges within the global supply chain, retention of an appropriately skilled workforce at the modification facility and an increase in certification complexity in the aviation sector have caused delays.

Andy Start, acting UK national armaments director and CEO of Defence Equipment and Support, told a UK Parliament Public Accounts Committee hearing on April 28: "The E-7 capability is late, and they have had real technical and delivery issues within Boeing in delivering that aircraft."

The first RAF E-7A Wedgetail delivery had been expected at the end of 2024, after the initial example, WT001 (c/n 38633), was rolled out on October 17, 2024, from the Satys Aircraft Livery paint shop at London/Southend Airport, wearing RAF markings. The RAF will receive three Wedgetails, all converted from Boeing 737-700 BBJ1s with extensive modifications undertaken by STS Aviation Services at Birmingham Airport.

Start noted: "We were originally buying five [E-7As] but reduced it to three in an earlier Strategic Defence Review. Because it's a fixed-price programme, the expectation is that Boeing will still deliver to the original price."

Kingfisher takes over

RESCUE SAUVETAGE
RCAF ARC

Canadian Armed Forces

THE ROYAL Canadian Air Force's Airbus CC-295 Kingfisher entered service and assumed search and rescue (SAR) duties at 19 Wing CFB Comox, British Columbia, on May 1. The 442 TRS CC-295s are operated alongside CH-149 Cormorant helicopters, providing 24/7, year-round SAR coverage in the region. CC-130Hs from 424 TRS at 8 Wing CFB Trenton, Ontario, 413 TRS at 14 Wing CFB Greenwood, Nova Scota and 435 TRS will continue supporting operations in the Trenton and Halifax SAR Regions until replaced by the CC-295s. Each squadron will receive three Kingfishers.

NEWS IN BRIEF

THE FIRST of six new Jupiter HC2s (Airbus Helicopters H145) was delivered to the UK Ministry of Defence on May 12. Acquired under a £122m contract signed in 2024, the helicopters will serve with the RAF in Brunei and Cyprus from 2026. The Jupiter was flown to MOD Boscombe Down to join the tri-service Rotary Wing Test and Evaluation Squadron. The first example, ZZ145, will be one of three based in Brunei to provide medical evacuation and medium lift capability for British troops exercising in jungle warfare. Formerly undertaken by Bell 212 AH1s of 667 Squadron Army Air Corps at Medicina Lines, the role has been performed since August 2022 by Puma HC2s of 230 Squadron. The other three examples will equip 84 Squadron at RAF Akrotiri for firefighting and SAR duties.

SWEDEN'S DEFENCE Materiel Administration (FMV) announced on May 23, the signing of a SEK 1.1bn (US$115m) contract for two Bombardier Global 6500 corporate jets. They will be used by the Swedish Air Force for VIP transport and designated the Tp106, and sourced from the secondhand market means they will come at a reduced cost. Delivery should take place by the end of 2025 and they will replace two Gulfstreams currently being used for VIP transport, a G-IVSP (Tp102C 102004) and a G550 (Tp102D 102005).

CZECH AIR FORCE JAS 39C Gripens from 211 Squadron based at Caslav Air Base departed for Keflavik on May 22, to take on NATO's Iceland Air Patrol tasking from May 31. The five jets, serialled 9235, 9236, 9239, 9240 and 9243 were armed with live AIM-9M Sidewinders and two, 9235 and 9236 had Litening 4i targeting pods fitted to help identify aircraft in the air. The Gripens will stay for five weeks along with nearly 100 Czech military personnel.

A REPORT by the USAF at Edwards AFB, California, revealed that RAF personnel had participated in the rapid certification of the KC-46A Pegasus to refuel the E-7A Wedgetail. UK aircrew joined colleagues from the RAAF and USAF for the trilateral test undertaken by the 418th Flight Test Squadron. The RAF does not possess a boom-equipped tanker, relying instead on USAF KC-135 Stratotankers to refuel its RC-135 Rivet Joints on NATO operations. An MoD spokesperson explained: "The RAF Wedgetail AEW1 has a Boom AAR capability and will be utilising allied boom equipped aircraft to increase endurance."

Malaysia strikes deal with Leonardo

THE MALAYSIAN armed forces have signed a deal with Leonardo and Weststar Aviation Group to deliver a mix of helicopters to fill multiple roles with the country's air force and army. The 'sale and purchase' framework unveiled on May 21 will cover up to 28 rotary-wing aircraft, with some to be distributed to Kuala Lumpur's other government agencies. Deliveries will run from 2026 to 2027.

Leonardo said the programme represents a significant growth of Leonardo Helicopters' presence among several Malaysian military, homeland security and public service operators. This includes various types for the Royal Malaysian Police and Bomba for law enforcement, utility, transport, firefighting, EMS/SAR and disaster relief missions. The programme also includes AW149 helicopters for the Royal Malaysian Air Force and the Royal Malaysian Army, for combat search and rescue and utility applications

Leonardo Helicopters

First NH-90 MSPTs for Spanish Navy

Airbus Helicopters

AIRBUS HELICOPTERS delivered the first two of seven new NH90 Tactical transport helicopters in the Multi-Role Support Transport (MSPT) variant to the Spanish Navy on May 29. The two NH90s are part of the second batch of Spain's NH90 programme which totals 23 aircraft which are scheduled to enter service this summer at Rota Naval base.

The MSPT NH90 is designed specifically to meet shipboard operations and the operational needs of the Spanish Navy for amphibious tactical transport of up to 20 fully equipped troops or a light vehicle. Modifications of the variant include reinforced landing gear, specific naval communications and navigation equipment, as well as automatic folding systems for the main rotor blades and rear fuselage. A key advantage of the NH90 MSPT is that it can conduct instrument flight rules (IFR) operations with a single pilot, allowing the helicopter to operate day and night in challenging conditions.

All three of Spain's military branches will now operate the NH90, and on May 13, the Spanish MOD and Airbus Helicopters signed a framework agreement for the implementation of the Spanish National Helicopter Plan, which foresees further expansion of the NH90 fleet for the country's armed forces.

Ukrainian sea drones strike

Russian MoD

A NEW 'historic first' was recorded on May 2, when a Russian Navy (RuN) Su-30SM *Flanker-H* multi-role fighter was shot down over the Black Sea by an unmanned aerial missile (AAM) launched from a HUR MOU unmanned surface vessel (USV), about 50km west of the Russian port of Novorossiysk.

Lt Gen Kyrylo Budanov, head of HUR MOU, said it was a new MAGURA V7 armed with AIM-9 Sidewinder AAMs, claiming that two Su-30SMs were downed that day. A video showing one aircraft being shot down was released, but the claim of a second Su-30SM and the type of AAM involved remains unconfirmed.

While Russia's Defense Ministry remained silent, Russian military bloggers confirmed the loss of a Su-30SM from the Crimea-based 43rd Separate Naval Assault Aviation Regiment from Saki Air Base, one of its aircraft being pictured here. Pilots ejected safely, subsequently being brought to shore by M/V *Victoria Fortune*, a Liberian container ship.

The RuN aircraft and helicopters have been successfully engaging Ukrainian USVs in the Black Sea for some time, using various weapons including conventional and cluster iron bombs and on-board machine guns. Since the spring of 2024, some USVs have been armed with adapted short-range AAMs or remotely operated machine gun turrets, intended as self-defense against Russian threats. **Vladimir Trendafilovski**

USS *Harry S Truman* returns home

US Navy/Petty Officer 3rd Class Michael Shen

AIRCRAFT CARRIER USS *Harry S. Truman* (CVN-75) and its Carrier Strike Group (CSG) returned home to Norfolk, Virginia, on June 1 after an eventful deployment to the US 5th and 6th fleet areas, performing NATO training exercises and combat operations in the Red Sea.

On February 1, while operating in support of US Africa Command from the Red Sea, the carrier's onboard air wing, Carrier Air Wing 1, carried out airstrikes and delivered 124,000lb of ordnance against ISIS-Somalia operatives. In March, the CSG led initial strikes against Iran-backed Houthi targets in Yemen during US CENTCOM's operation Rough Rider. The Strike Group launched Tomahawk land attack missiles and precision airstrikes via F/A-18E/Fs for more than 50 days, completing more than 13,000 sorties and over 25,000 flight hours.

Capt Leslie Mintz, commander of CVW-1 said: "Throughout this deployment, our aviators showed immense proficiency and professionalism while striking Houthi targets across Yemen and defending the strike group and merchant vessels from threats."

NEWS IN BRIEF

A £300M CONTRACT has been awarded by the UK Ministry of Defence to Ascent Flight Training to generate a four-fold increase in the number of Mission Aircrew students trained each year. The move reflects the increased demand for mission aircrew for the new Wedgetail AEW1 and Protector RG1 fleets, along with continued growth of the Poseidon MRA1 force. New buildings will be erected at RNAS Culdrose and RAF Cranwell to house what is described as "new state-of-the-art realistic, synthetic and mission simulated environments, training facilities and equipment". There will be no expansion of the fleet of four Avenger T1s (King Air 350ERs) operated by 750 NAS at Culdrose.

STORMSHROUD, A NEW uncrewed aircraft (UAS) is to be introduced into operational service with the RAF. Billed as the first of a new family of autonomous collaborative platforms (ACP) it is the first tangible capability delivered following the launch of the RAF's ACP strategy in March 2024. The platform for StormShroud is the Tekever AR3, which will carry Leonardo UK's BriteStorm electronic warfare payload. This low size, weight and power (SWAP) stand-in jammer has at its core an advanced miniature techniques generator which, when paired with a range of transmit/receive modules and antennas, can jam early warning, surveillance and target tracking radars. BriteStorm can also generate obscuration and confusion techniques to prevent the enemy building up a complete air picture.

THE RAF'S fleet of F-35B Lightnings grew to 38 on May 8 with the delivery of a further two examples to RAF Marham. Supported by a Voyager tanker, the new TR3 aircraft – ZM171/'037' and ZM172/'038' – were flown via Lajes with a pair of F-35Bs – ZM144/'010' and ZM145/'011' – returning from being upgraded to TR3 at MCAS Cherry Point, South Carolina. The UK has 48 Lightnings on order, the first of which was delivered in 2013. The Lightning Force is expected to declare full operating capability by the end of the year.

THE EA-37B Compass Call electronic attack aircraft flew its first training mission on May 2 at Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona. The new aircraft, which replaces the EC-130H Compass Call, is based on the Gulfstream G550 and has been adapted to provide support to the US and allied forces against enemy attacks. It has defence systems for jamming enemy communications, radar and navigation signals, and can wirelessly defuse roadside bombs and block enemy transmissions. This capability means it will participate in suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) missions. A deal is in place for the USAF to purchase ten EA-37Bs from BAE Systems and L3Harris. Five have already been delivered, with the remaining scheduled for delivery in 2027 and 2028.

'Yorkshire Yankee' open for business

A new venture at Breighton in East Yorkshire is offering flight experiences in 1945-built, USAAC-marked Boeing Stearman A75N1 (G-BAVO).

Affectionately dubbed the 'Yorkshire Yankee' and boasting military history, this "American flying experience" is operated by RM Classic Aviation Ltd and supported by the Breighton-based Real Aeroplane Club. Readers may remember Victor-Oscar – which arrived in the UK in 1980 – when it was under the custodianship of actor Martin Shaw between 2001 and 2011. With numerous flight experience options available, see www.yorkshireyankee.co.uk

Stearman 'Yorkshire Yankee' is now available for flight experiences Brad Simpson

Mitsubishi 'Zero' makes long awaited return

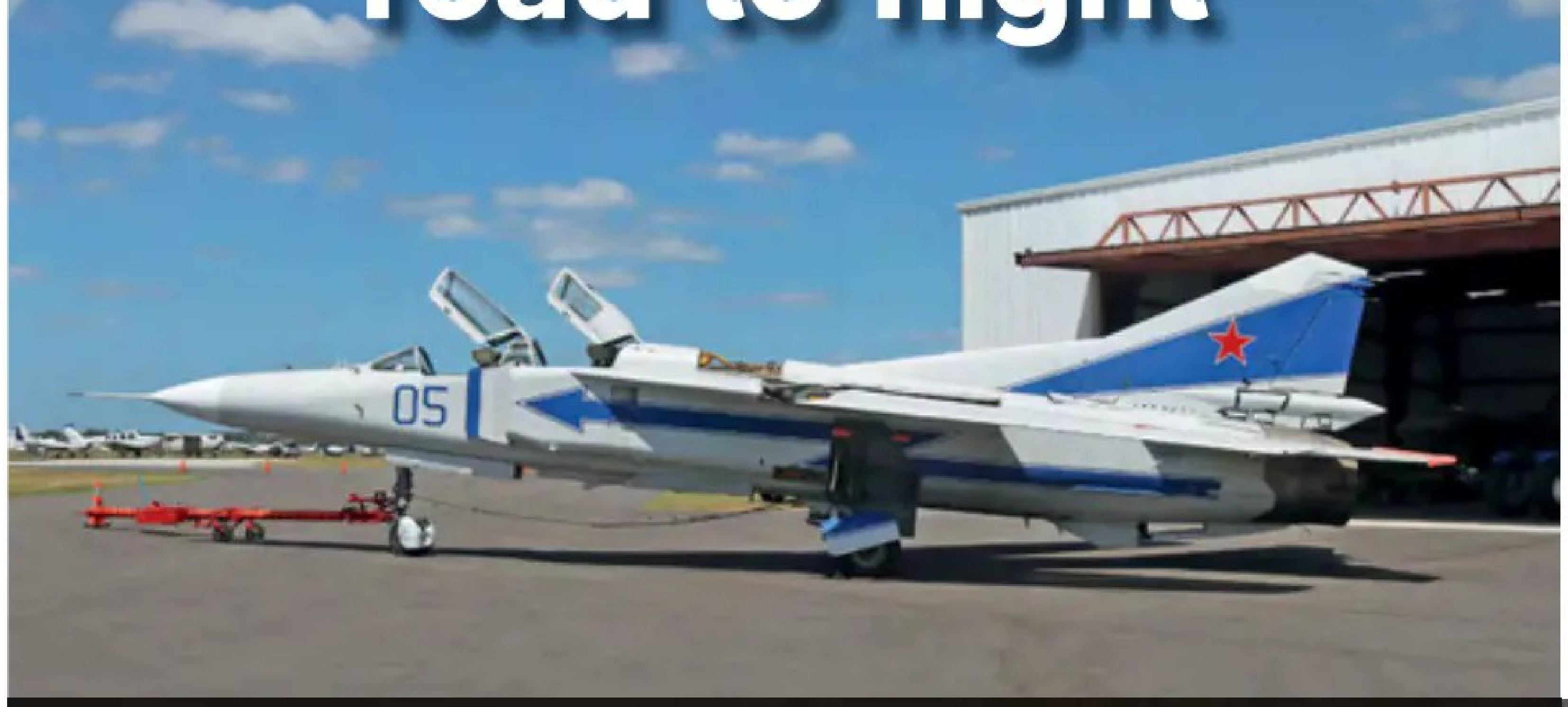
The Military Aviation Museum's Mitsubishi A6M3 Model 32 'Zero' made a successful first flight on May 5 with the attraction's chief pilot Mike Spalding in the cockpit.

The flight took place from Paine Field in Everett, Washington, and is the culmination of around three decades of work, primarily by Everett-based Legend Flyers. It was also the first time a Model 32 'Zero' has flown since the end of World War Two.

After a sortie of around 30 minutes in which Mike took the former Imperial Japanese Navy fighter up to around 4,200ft and carried out a series of tests, it landed safely and Mike declared that the aircraft "handled exceptionally well and was light on the controls". Further test flights will be undertaken before the rare fighter can be flown to the Military Aviation Museum's Virginia Beach home.

The A6M3 lifts off from Paine Field on May 5 Simon Butler

Flogger pair on the road to flight


A pair of former Czech Air Force Mikoyan-Gurevich Mig-23UB Floggers are being returned to airworthy condition by Varna Aviation Group in Lakeland, Florida. N51734 briefly flew in the US, but has been grounded for several years while new parts were ordered and an engine leak addressed. N5106E '7827' is at an earlier stage and is awaiting a full rebuild, hopefully to flying status. It is currently sanded down and ready for further airframe checks. Barry Ambrose

Rare dual control Mustang restored in US

American Aero Services has completed the five-year restoration of a 1943-built North American TP-51C Mustang. This unusual dual control version of the fighter has joined the US register as N251MX, and was recently listed for sale via Platinum Fighter Sales. Now named 'The Stars Lookdown', it was originally built as P-51C 42-103293 and assigned to the USAAF in March 1944 American Aero Services/Platinum Fighters

Dornier's advanced evolution

Deutsche Aircraft

DEUTSCHE AIRCRAFT rolled out the initial D328eco test aircraft, TAC 1, at its headquarters in the Airtech Campus in Oberpfaffenhofen near Munich, Germany, on May 28.More than 500 guests attended the ceremony, including key stakeholders from the Bavarian and federal government, industry partners and suppliers. Nico Neumann, co-chief executive officer of Deutsche Aircraft, described the event as "a significant achievement [and an] important step towards our physical flight test activities."

Deutsche Aircraft reported it is now "poised to start the test campaign, marking a significant step towards type certification and the aircraft's subsequent entry into service." The company is targeting the fourth quarter of 2027 as the service entry date for the aircraft. An official statement noted: "The development of the D328eco is propelled by close collaboration with regulatory authorities, strategic industry partners and a highly skilled global supply chain. These partnerships ensure that the aircraft will adhere to the highest standards of performance, safety and sustainability."

The D328eco is a new variant of the Dornier 328 turboprop airliner produced in the 1990s. Dornier Luftfahrt GmbH (later Fairchild Dornier GmbH) developed the original aircraft, which first flew in 1991, and produced 107 examples. A jet-powered version, the 328JET, was developed later.

Fairchild Dornier filed for bankruptcy in 2002 and the Dornier 328/328JET type certificate was acquired in June 2006 by 328 Support Services GmbH (328SSG), a company that was subsequently acquired by the US aerospace and defence firm Sierra Nevada Corporation. In August 2019, it was announced that 328SSG had established a new company, DRA GmbH, to develop a new generation of the Dornier 328 and set up a final assembly line at Leipzig/Halle Airport. In 2021, DRA GmbH was rebranded as Deutsche Aircraft and the new airframe was named the D328eco. In 2023, Private Wings was announced as the first customer, signing a letter of intent for five aircraft.

Deutsche Aircraft describes the D328eco as "a next-generation regional aircraft" designed to "set new standards in regional aviation", emphasising that it will be "an advanced evolution, not a clean-sheet aircraft." Key differences from the original Dornier 328 will include modernised aerodynamics, Pratt & Whitney Canada PW127XT-S engines and optimised operational performance. The aircraft will be capable of handling challenging runways, remote locations and extreme weather conditions. The D328eco will feature an integrated Garmin Companion flight deck based on the Garmin G5000 avionics suite. There will also be a larger passenger cabin compared with the original aircraft. **Mark Broadbent**

727 to 737 for OSRL

2Excel

ON MAY 22, it was announced that the UK-based 2Excel Group will retire its veteran Boeing 727s in favour of specially modified 737-800s as part of a new 20-year contract with Oil Spill Response Limited (OSRL) for global oil dispersant services. Set to begin operation in 2028, the pair of 737s will succeed the two long serving trijets that have formed the backbone of OSRL's response service since operations began in 2016, under the 2Excels Special Missions operation.

G-OSRA (c/n 22938) and G-OSRB (c/n 22929) were among the last 727s to roll off the production line and were delivered to FedEx in September 1984 and October 1983, respectively. Both were retired in September 2012 and were then fitted with 2Excel's TERSUS dispersant system.

The 737s will be equipped with an improved TERSUS II system that, according to OSRL, offers improved components for a longer life and enhanced performance, along with other continuously developing features such as the Flight in Known Icing (FIKI) modification that allows the aircraft to operate in icy conditions, also developed by the 2Excel team. The 737s will be hangared and capable of deploying worldwide at six hours' notice.

India & Pakistan Clash

▲ The IAF's Rafale EHs formed the core of the strike force during Operation Sindoor during which they entered the Indian airspace to drop precision-guided munitions on their targets which exposed them to the deadly PL-15s of the PAF's J-10CPs Babak Taghvaee

▼ A Pakistan Air Force J-10CP taxies out of its hardened aircraft shelter at PAF Base Minhas, the home of the 'Venomous Cobras'. It is equipped with two PL-10 short range air-to-air missiles on the wing tips and four very long-range PL-15s, which the PAF claims shot down five Indian Air Force fighters, India has confirmed three. Awais Lali

On May 7, the Indian Air Force using a range of airpower conducted precision strikes on targets within Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir. These strikes saw retaliation from Pakistan and the claimed first global loss of a Dassault Rafale in combat. **David Willis** and **Babak Taghvaee** take a detailed look at the operation

April 22, saw a deadly terrorist attack that killed 25 Indian nationals plus one Nepalese civilian near Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir. Following the attack, the Indian government took a series of significant actions, including suspending the Indus Waters Treaty, expelling Pakistani diplomats, and closing the borders. Subsequently, the Indian government issued an order for the Indian Air Force (IAF) to conduct retaliatory airstrikes.

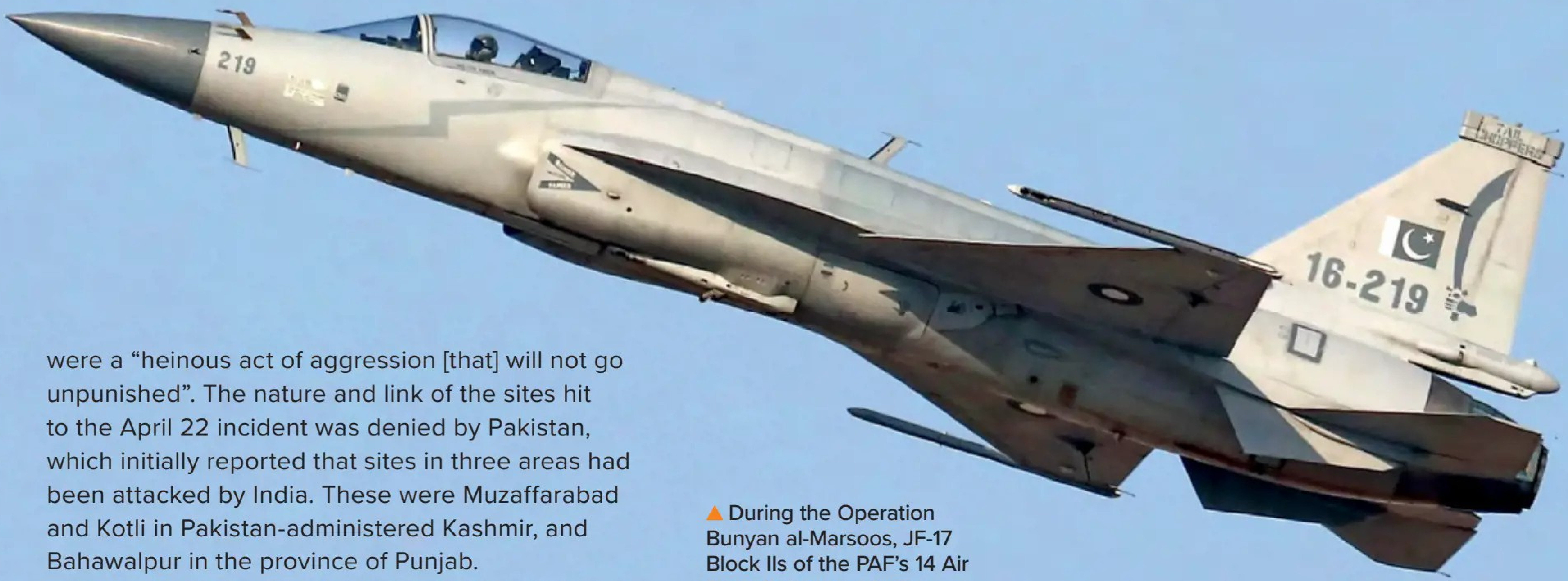
It is believed that 75-80 Indian Air Force aircraft took part in the airstrikes under codename Operation Sindoor. The strikes on May 7 were conducted between 01:05 and 01:30hrs, the types reportedly involved were the Dassault Rafale believed to have been utilising MBDA SCALP cruise missiles and HAMMER (Highly Agile Modular Munition Extended Range) precision-guided munitions. Other aircraft were the IAF MiG-29 *Fulcrum* and Su-30MKI, and possibly the Mirage 2000. Aircraft were also supported by IAF Il-78MKI tankers.

Dehli stated during the early hours of May 7 that nine different locations were "terrorist infrastructure" - places where attacks were "planned and directed".

It emphasised that it had not hit any Pakistani military facilities, saying its "actions have been focused, measured and non-escalatory in nature".

"Our objective was solely to combat terrorism and eliminate terrorist threats. Accordingly, on May 7, our operations focused exclusively on identified terrorist targets," stated Air Marshal AK Bharti, Director General Air Operations (DGAO), Indian Air Force, during a press briefing on Operation Sindoor.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif described the strikes as "unprovoked", going on to say they



▲ During the Operation Bunyan al-Marsoos, JF-17 Block IIs of the PAF's 14 Air Superiority squadron, based at Rafiqui AB, conducted SEAD operation against the IAF's S-400 SAM batteries using CM-400AKG hypersonic air-to-surface missiles on May 10 Babak Taghvaee

were a "heinous act of aggression [that] will not go unpunished". The nature and link of the sites hit to the April 22 incident was denied by Pakistan, which initially reported that sites in three areas had been attacked by India. These were Muzaffarabad and Kotli in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, and Bahawalpur in the province of Punjab.

All were described by Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif, as civilian areas, while Lt Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry, a Pakistani military spokesperson, said that at least 26 people had been killed because of the attacks, and another 46 were injured. Chaudry later went on to say six locations had been hit, with two targets each in Muzaffarabad and Kotli, and one in Barnala, Mehmoona Joya, Muridke and Sarjal. According to statements released by the PAF, five Indian fighter aircraft – comprising three Rafale EHs, one Su-30MKI, and one MiG-29UPG – were reportedly downed during the IAF offensive on May 7. However, post-strike open-source intelligence (OSINT), including civilian-recorded videos and photographic evidence circulated by Indian media outlets, confirmed the loss of three aircraft: a Rafale EH (BS001), a Su-30MKI, and a MiG-29UPG, all within Indian airspace.

PAF sources attributed all confirmed kills to PL-15 active radar homing long-range air-to-air missiles (ARH LRAAMs), launched by Chengdu J-10CP multirole fighters of 15 Squadron, the 'Venomous Cobras'. This squadron is a component of the PAF's 33rd Tactical Wing based at Minhas AB in Kamra. Contrary to Indian expectations, these J-10CPs were reportedly equipped with the non-export variant of the PL-15 missile, featuring an extended engagement envelope of 125-155 miles significantly greater than the commonly assumed export range of 75-90 miles.

In the wake of these airstrikes, the Pakistani Army and Air Force initiated a counteroffensive, focusing on military targets within India, titled Operation Bunyan al-Marsoos. Utilising one-way attack drones, precision-guided rockets, and air-launched ballistic missiles, Pakistani forces targeted Indian air defence systems, radar installations, and airbases located near the international border.

On May 9/10, in retaliation, the IAF launched a strike on 13 military installations within Pakistan, predominantly targeting assets associated with the PAF. This included the destruction or damage of a C-130 Hercules transport aircraft and a Saab 2000 airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) aircraft, along with the neutralisation of several early warning radars belonging to the Pakistan Army Air Defence Corps (PAADC).

The escalating hostilities culminated in a ceasefire agreement brokered by the United States, which came into effect on May 10, effectively halting the immediate military actions between the two nuclear nations.

▶ The IAF's fleet of four Il-78MKI tankers are currently experiencing problems associated with their age and high number of flying hours and cycles. During Operation Sindoor, at least two were airborne over central India refuelling the combat aircraft on CAP duty Indian Air Force

▲ All of the IAF's MiG-29UPGs are based in the western and southwestern areas of India to protect the country during any war with Pakistan. Their serviceability is reported to be around 60%, meaning 37 out of 52 of them are airworthy simultaneously RAC MiG

▼ The 220 Squadron of the IAF's 34 Wing at Halwara AFS is one of three units of the Western Air Command operating Su-30MKI-3 multirole fighter jets which took part in Operation Sindoor on May 7 and retaliatory strikes at Pakistani military sites on May 9/10. One of its Su-30MKI-3s can be seen here Tarao Goo

Two RNLAF F-16AM (MLU) Fighting Falcons in their final days serving with the RNLAF's 312 Squadron Aviation News

Destination Ukraine

Dutch Defence Minister Ruben Brekelmans watches on as an F-16 roars away above Volkel's runway Koninklijke Luchtmacht

Aviation News spoke with Royal Netherlands Air Force commander LtGen Andre 'Jabba' Steur about delivering fourth-generation F-16s to Ukraine, along with support, skills and knowledge

On May 26, the final two of 24 Lockheed Martin F-16AM/BM (MLU) Fighting Falcons left the Netherlands bound for the Ukrainian frontline. The jets departed Volkel AB and flew to Charleroi in Belgium to undergo scheduled maintenance before they join the Ukrainian Air Force.

Just under two years earlier, in August 2023, a year-and-a-half since Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, the defending country was in need of more modern air defence. The US approved the donation of F-16s to Ukraine from Denmark and the Netherlands. Just under a year later in July 2024, after preparations

▲ **Technicians prepare one of the last two F-16 Fighting Falcons for their final flight from Volkel AB** Koninklijke Luchtmacht

and personnel training, a joint statement from the Americans, Dutch and Danes confirmed that the transfer of the fighter jets was underway.

Ukraine is to receive a total of 85 jets. In addition to the 24 from the Netherlands, it will receive 30 from Belgium once the nation's F-35 force is at strength, 19 from Denmark and 12 from Norway. A further 18 BM (two-seater) models from the Netherlands were delivered to the European F-16 Training Centre (EFTC) in Romania, where the Ukrainian F-16 pilots and ground staff are trained. The first batch of Ukrainian pilots started their training at the EFTC in September 2024 (others had already begun training Skrydstrup Air Base in Denmark in autumn 2023).

With all this preparation and deliveries ongoing, the F-16AM was retired from active service with the Royal Netherlands Air Force (RNLAF) in September 2024 after 45 years of service. The RNLAF had a large job on its hands to prepare and deliver the F-16s to Ukraine at the same time as building its own fifth-generation fighter force with the F-35A Lightning II.

Following the delivery of the final two F-16s, Aviation News asked RNLAF commander LtGen Andre 'Jabba' Steur how he was feeling. He responded: "I am very proud. Within less than two years, different departments and directorates have worked really hard to make the delivery of the F-16s possible. This a dedicated team within the RNLAF, but also the directorate at the Ministry of Defence that co-ordinates all Dutch military support to Ukraine."

Although LtGen Steur couldn't share how many flying hours these donated aircraft had left, he did say: "Even though the F-16's have served the RNLAF exceptionally well for a very long time, they are still a force to be reckoned with and will be able to serve the Ukrainian Air Force for a long while yet. We have delivered 24 operational F-16s ready to be used in the war against the Russian Federation. [They will bring defence and deterrence] with the most successful fourth-generation fighter jet.

"Our air force will continue to provide the Air Force Capability Coalition (AFCC) with knowledge and skills while we can. Delivering the F-16s was just the first step towards helping to transform the Ukrainian Air Force into a fourth-generation air force. We will continue to provide training, advice and support within the AFCC."

▼ **Lt Gen Andre Steur (second from right), Dutch Defence Minister Ruben Brekelmans (far right) and other RNLAF personnel watch as the final F-16s prepare to depart for Ukraine** Koninklijke Luchtmacht

▲ The newly acquired A330-243 of Iran Air, EP-IJD, can be seen during its first test flight at Tehran's Mehrabad International Airport on May 3, 2025. Ramin Ghavami

Iran Air expands its wide-body fleet

Babak Taghvaee discusses the Hong Kong Airlines' Airbus A330-243s entering service with wide-body troubled Iran Air

Iran Air, Iran's national flag carrier, was historically the largest airline in the country and once operated the most extensive wide-body fleet in the region. Between 2012 and 2016, its long-haul capabilities were centred on a fleet of eight Boeing 747s, including one 747-186B, one 747-230BM, two 747-286BMs, and four 747SP-86s. However, due to their advanced age and non-compliance with international environmental and noise regulations, these aircraft were banned from European airspace. As a result, Iran Air's operations to Europe were relegated to four Airbus A300B4-605Rs and two A310-304s.

A partial solution emerged in 2017 when Iran Air acquired two Airbus A330-203s originally built for Avianca. Delivered in March 2017, these aircraft enabled the airline to re-establish some of its European routes until November 2024, when sanctions imposed by the European Union terminated the airline's operations to the continent. Reportedly, the banning was due to the airline's alleged involvement in transporting ballistic missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles from Iran to Russia. These measures were part of broader sanctions targeting Iranian military support for Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its involvement with armed proxy groups in the Middle East and the Red Sea region.

Despite these limitations, the A330-203s, alongside the ageing A300 fleet, remained heavily utilised on routes to the Middle East and Asia. Faced with an acute shortage of wide-body capacity, particularly in anticipation of increased demand during the 2025 Hajj pilgrimage season, Iran Air procured two former Airbus A330-243s from Hong Kong Airlines in 2024. The pair were delivered on April 17, 2025, and entered revenue service on May 2 and 4. The expansion of the A330 fleet is aimed at compensating for the operational degradation of Iran Air's Airbus A300B4-605Rs, whose escalating maintenance and operational costs have been exacerbated by their advanced service age.

Both A330s are powered by Rolls-Royce Trent 772B-60 turbofan engines and have a C18Y246 cabin configuration (18 business class and 246 economy class seats). Having arrived in Muscat, Oman, on April 2, they were ferried to Tehran on April 17 carrying Iranian registrations EP-IJC and EP-IJD.

▼ One of two A310-304s of Iran Air, EP-IBK, was last seen airworthy on July 28, 2024. It has been grounded due to spare part shortage and budgetary issues Babak Taghvaee

▲ This A330-203, EP-IJA (c/n 1540) was built for Avianca in 2014 with its first flight on June 2 of that year but was not taken and ended-up in storage at Teruel until Iran Air acquired it and transferred it to Iran on March 10, 2017. It is shown here at Paris-CDG airport Babak Taghvaee

Upon arrival at Tehran-Mehrabad Airport, the aircraft were transferred to Iran Air's A300 maintenance facility for reconfiguration and livery application, while their interiors retained the original Hong Kong Airlines cabin décor. Following ground checks and pre-delivery tests, EP-IJC (MSN 1286) and EP-IJD (MSN 1322) each completed their maiden test flights on May 1 and 3, 2025, respectively. Thereafter, they were transferred to Tehran-Imam Khomeini International Airport and integrated into the airline's operational A330 fleet alongside the two existing A330-203s (EP-IJA and EP-IJB), which currently operate international services to destinations including Baku, Dubai, Istanbul, Jeddah, and Mumbai.

Until the aforementioned EU sanctions in late 2024, EP-IJA and EP-IJB had routinely operated flights to several European destinations including Paris-Charles de Gaulle, Cologne, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Milan, and Vienna. However, EP-IJA completed its final European flight to London on October 17, 2024, while EP-IJB flew its last flight to London-Heathrow on November 7, 2024, due to the sanctions.

Although the acquisition of the A330-243s was conducted without authorisation from the US specifically the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) within the US Department of the Treasury – the Iranian state media portrayed the aircraft deliveries as a diplomatic achievement linked to ongoing nuclear negotiations.

The Problematic A310 and A300 Fleets

Operational reliability of the A300B4-605R fleet has continued to deteriorate. On January 4, 2025, EP-IBC – one of only two airworthy A300B4-605Rs at that time – experienced an engine failure after take-off from Jeddah and was forced to make an emergency landing in Medina. Iran Air airlifted a General Electric CF6-80C2A5F engine to Medina for replacement, enabling EP-IBC to return to Iran on 19 January 2025. The incident occurred merely two days after the aircraft had returned to service following a C-Check performed at Iran Air's A300 maintenance facility at Tehran-Mehrabad.

Further compounding the situation, EP-IBA suffered a technical failure in March 2025 while on the ground in Bushehr and was grounded for 12 hours. Iran Air has been able to sustain operations with only two of its original four A300B4-605Rs.

Meanwhile, both airline's remaining A310-304s are currently non-operational. EP-IBL has been grounded at Tehran-Imam Khomeini International Airport since April 2018, after donating an engine to EP-IBK. The latter aircraft remained airworthy until it was grounded at Mehrabad on July 28, 2024. EP-IBK had only returned to service on May 28, 2024, following a major C-Check but was subsequently grounded due to a shortage of critical spare parts caused by financial problems of the airline to acquire them.

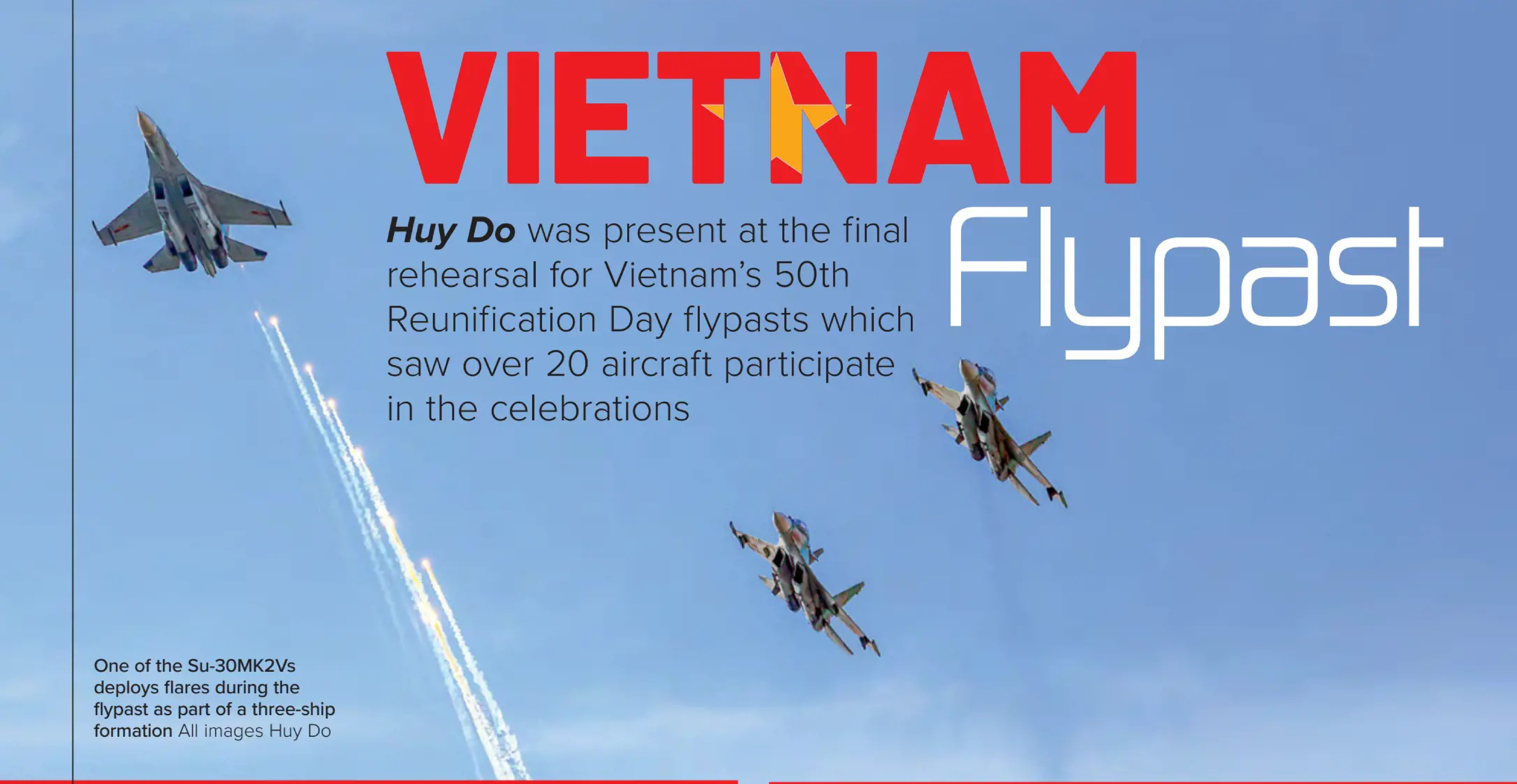
As of May 2025, Iran Air's fleet comprises 35 aircraft, of which only 13 are currently airworthy. These include four Airbus A330s (two -203s and two newly acquired -243s), one A300B4-203FF (EP-IBG), three A300B4-605Rs (EP-IBA, EP-IBC, EP-IBD), two Airbus A319-111s (EP-IEP and EP-IEQ), two ATR 72-600s (EP-ITM and EP-ITI), and one Boeing 747-21AC cargo aircraft.

The remaining 22 aircraft – comprising one A300B4-605R, two A310-304s, one A319-111, three A320-211s, one A321-211SL, 11 ATR 72-600s, and three Fokker 100s – remain grounded. Notably, these groundings are primarily the result of Iran Air's budgetary constraints and inability to procure spare parts through illicit channels, unlike many other Iranian carriers that have successfully sustained operations under international sanctions for decades. AN

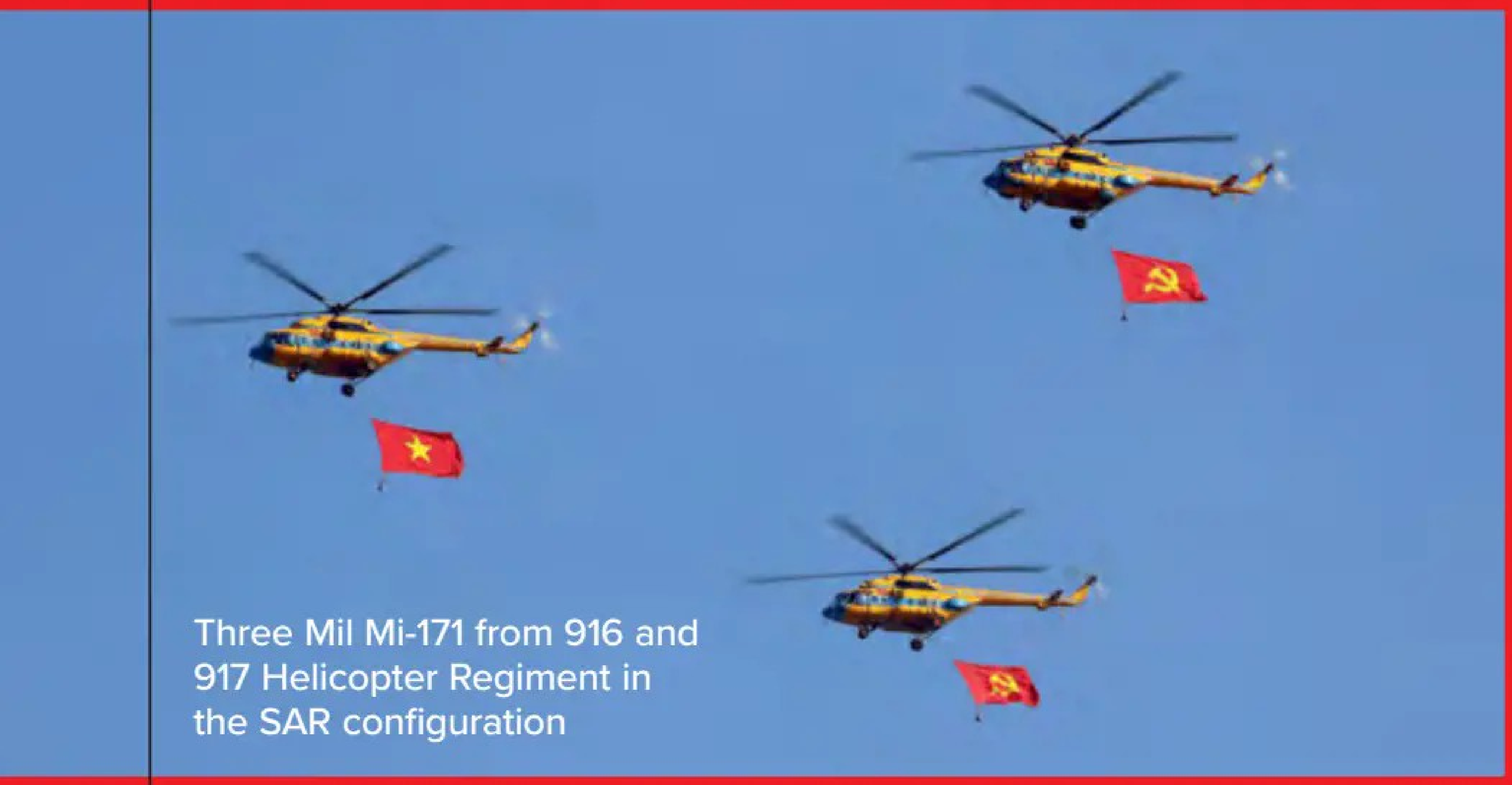
▼ Another A330-203 of Iran Air, EP-IJB (c/n 1586) was originally ordered by Avianca but not taken up, so was also acquired by Iran Air and was flown to Iran on March 25, 2017. It is shown here in Paris in 2024 Babak Taghvaee

VIETNAM Flypast

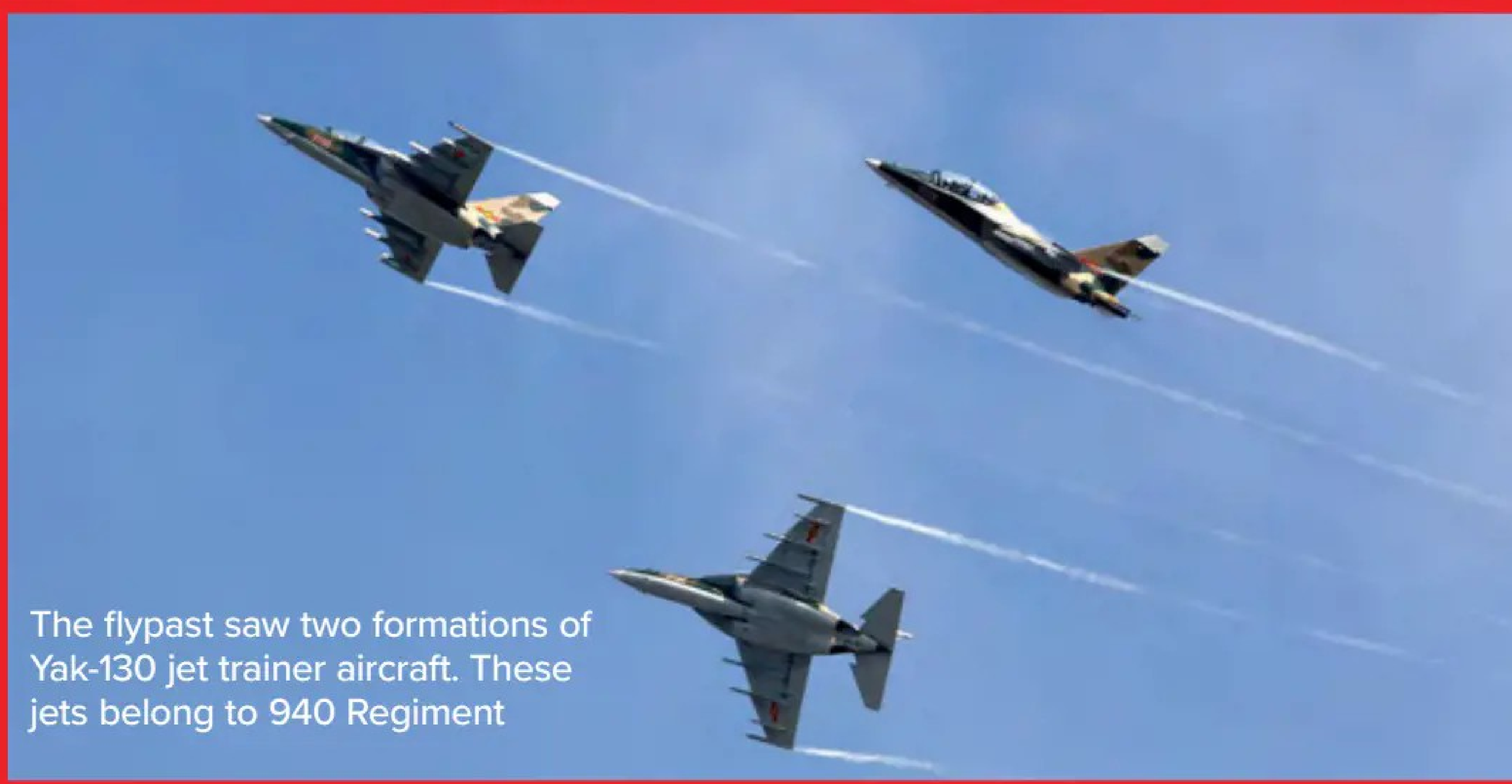
Huy Do was present at the final rehearsal for Vietnam's 50th Reunification Day flypasts which saw over 20 aircraft participate in the celebrations



One of the Su-30MK2Vs deploys flares during the flypast as part of a three-ship formation All images Huy Do

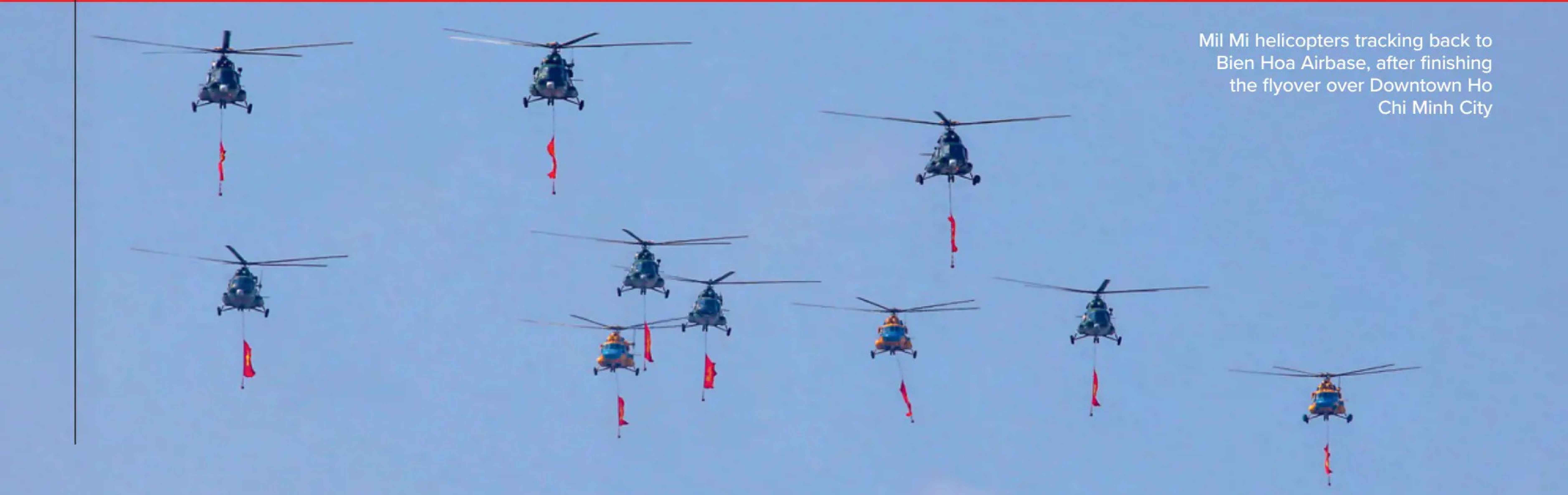


Three Mil Mi-171 from 916 and 917 Helicopter Regiment in the SAR configuration



The flypast saw two formations of Yak-130 jet trainer aircraft. These jets belong to 940 Regiment

Vietnamese Reunification Day, also known as Liberation Day, is celebrated on April 30 each year and marks the fall of Saigon in 1975 and the official end of the Resistance War Against America. This day symbolises national unity, resilience, and the sacrifices of the Vietnamese people during one of the most difficult periods in their history. The air display took place over downtown Ho Chi Minh city, which had always been a no-fly zone since 1975. The flyover consists of ten Mi-8/Mi-17/Mi-171 in 3-4-3 formations, with the last one featuring 3 Mi-171 in SAR configuration, then six Yak-130 in 3-3 formations and seven Su-30 in 4-3 formations. All 23 aircraft departed from nearby Bien Hoa Airbase, before joining up for the formation over downtown. They made one pass over downtown, above Independence Palace, before looping around for another pass, with Sukhoi Su-30MK2V deploying flares on the second pass.



Mil Mi helicopters tracking back to Bien Hoa Airbase, after finishing the flyover over Downtown Ho Chi Minh City

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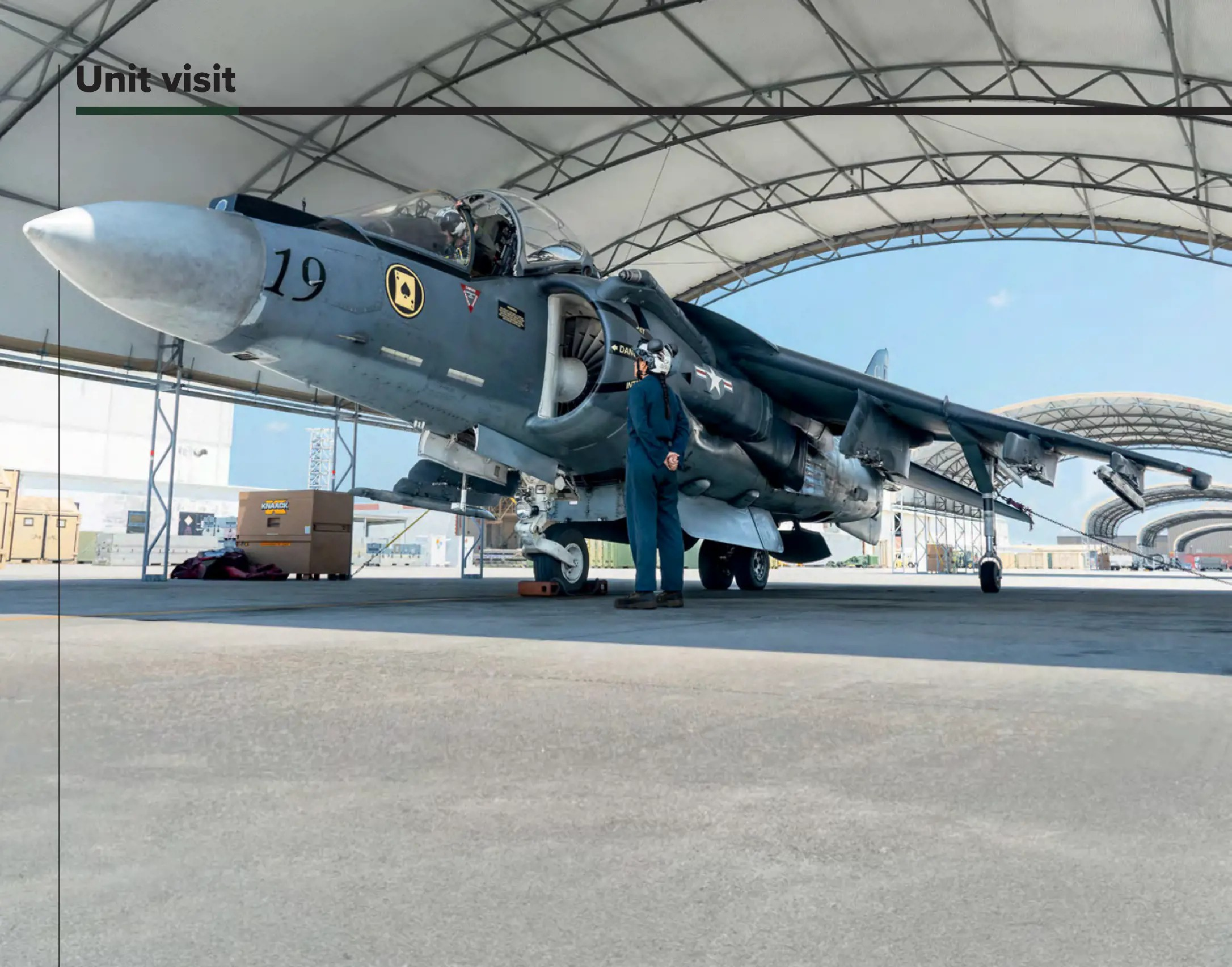


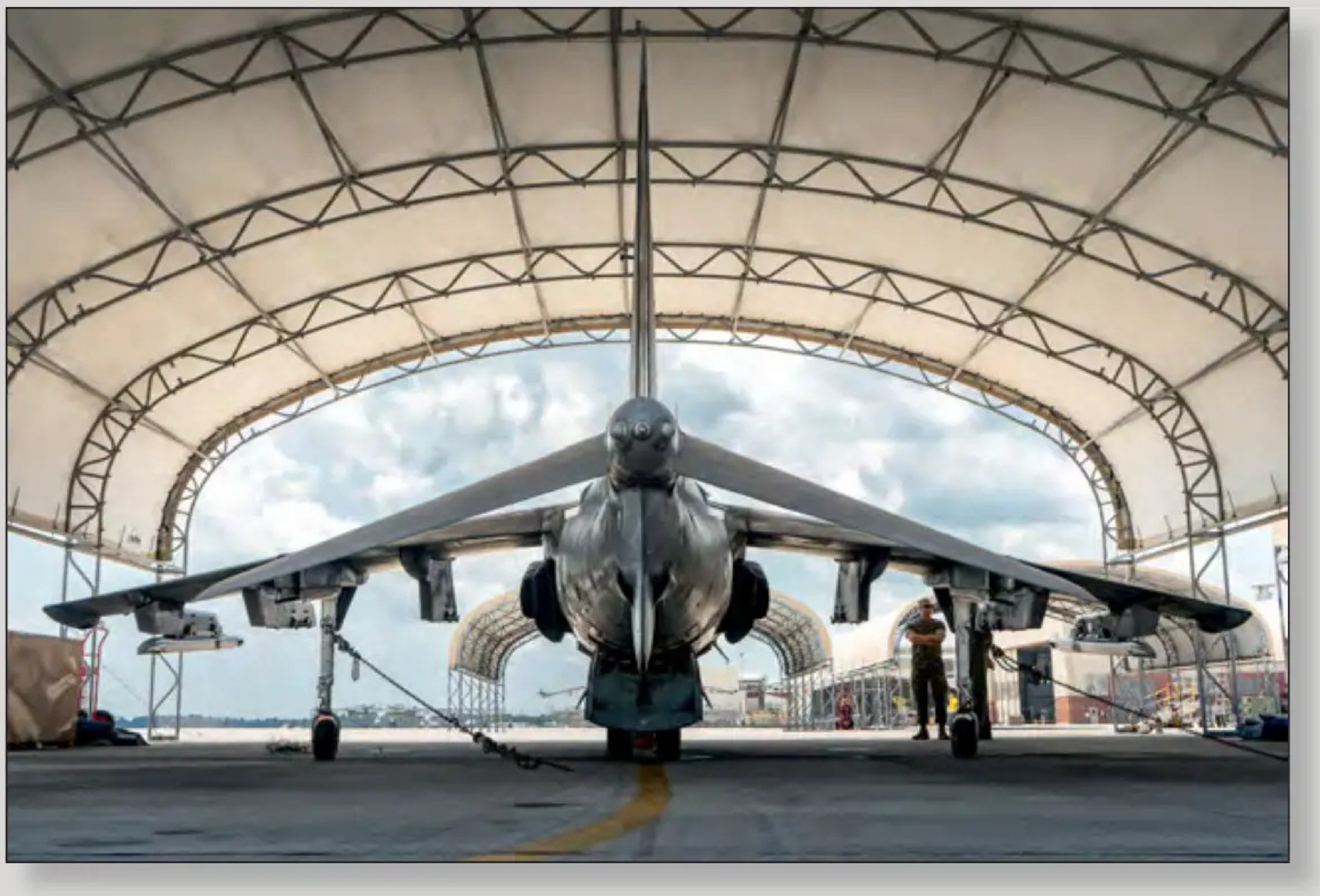
HARRIERS LAST CALL

Tyler Hernandez visited MCAS Cherry Point, North Carolina, to witness ops during the final days of one of the few remaining United States Marine Corps' Harrier squadrons

▲ An aviator from VMA-231 prepares to start the engine on the heritage livery AV-8B II Plus All images Tyler Hernandez

In the twilight of the Harrier's celebrated career, the US Marine Corps (USMC) had just two squadrons still operating the venerable AV-8B II. One of them, VMA-231 'Ace of Spades,' completed their final flight as a Harrier squadron at the end of last month (May 2025). VMA-231 is a storied squadron and the oldest active squadron in Marine Corps' aviation history. The 'Spades' trace their lineage back to 1st Division, Squadron D, which was founded on February 8, 1919. In 1921 they were subsequently redesignated as the First Air Squadron and adopted the famous Ace of Spades insignia, with the A in the upper left of the logo standing for 'Air' and the S in the bottom for 'Squadron'.

The Ace of Spades saw extensive combat during World War Two. Initially, the squadron was redesignated as Marine Scout Bombing Squadron 231 and was assigned to fly the SBD Dauntless dive bomber. They deployed multiple times to the Pacific theatre and were a part of the iconic Cactus Air Force during the battle of Guadalcanal. The Spades closed out their time during World War Two flying the legendary F4U Corsair and were credited with seven aerial victories against the Japanese. Post war, the



▲ An AV-8B II Plus Harrier sits under its shelter waiting for its next flight

squadron transitioned to a reserve role before being temporarily deactivated in 1962.

On May 15, 1973, the Ace of Spades was reactivated as VMA-231 and assigned to fly the newest aircraft in the USMC inventory, the Hawker Siddeley AV-8A Harrier. During their early years flying the first iteration of the Harrier, the squadron captured many firsts for Marine Corps Vertical/Short Takeoff and Landing (V/STOL) squadrons. In 1977, they were named V/STOL Squadron of the Year. Other notable firsts include being the first squadron to fly the Harrier aboard an America-class amphibious assault ship and the first squadron to fly a transatlantic flight in the Harrier.

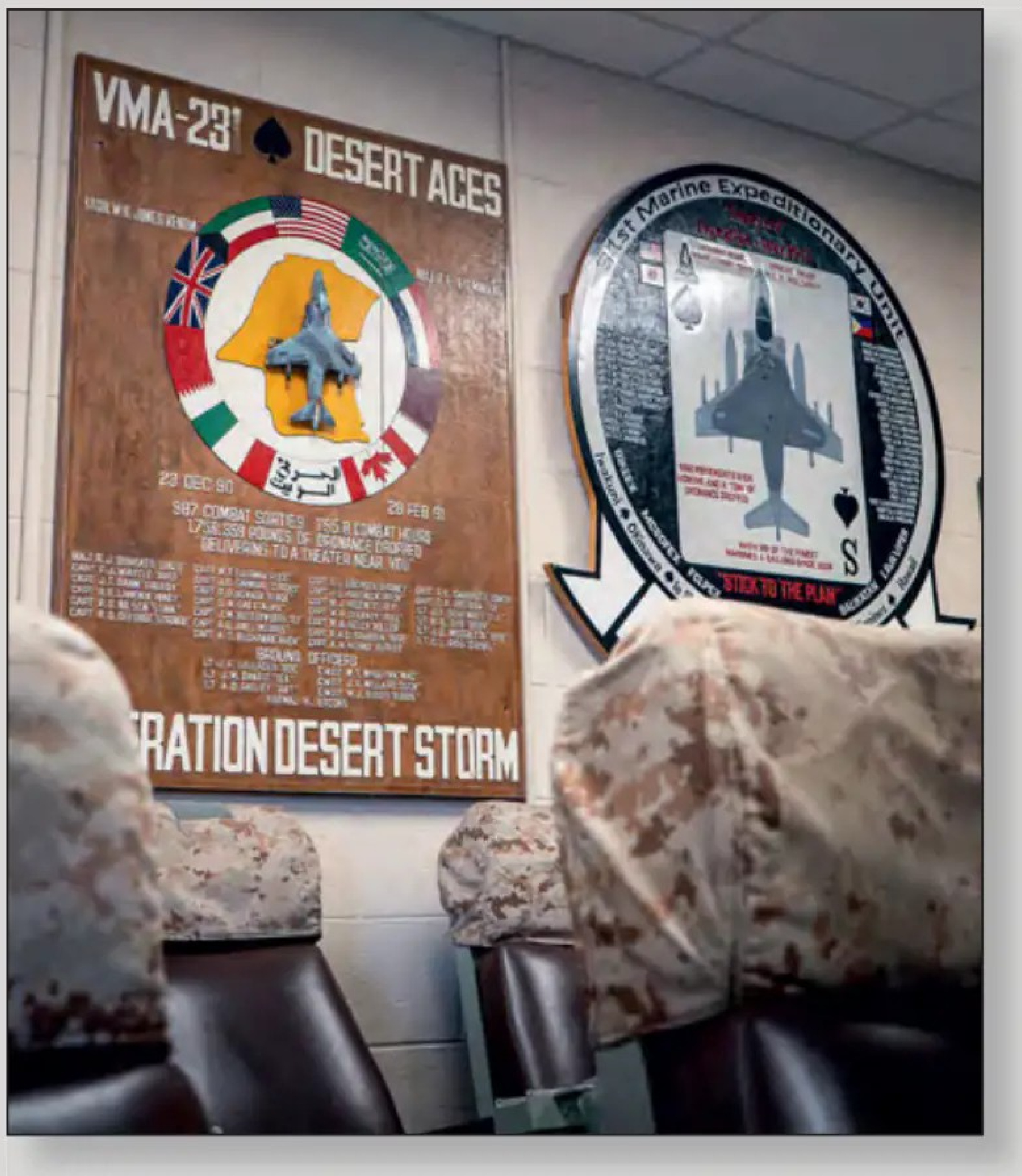
In August 1985, VMA-231 flew the AV-8A for the final time, and in September, they transitioned to the upgraded AV-8B II built by McDonnell Douglas. The newer model of Harrier featured many needed upgrades, including composite materials, better engine performance, upgraded avionics, and a new angle rate bombing system. This upgrade proved to be timely as in December of 1990, VMA-231 flew over 18,000nm in just two weeks to join Marine Aircraft Group 13 and support Operation Desert Shield, which subsequently led to their involvement in Operation Desert Storm.

During Desert Storm, the Marines of VMA-231 once again proved themselves to be a vital asset to the coalition forces, flying missions each day of the campaign. The squadron racked up nearly 1,000 combat sorties and almost 1,200 flight hours during the fight to push the Iraqis out of Kuwait. The Squadron expended a total of 1,660 Mk-82 500lb bombs, 62 Mk-83 1,000lb bombs, 969 Mk-20 Rockeye cluster munitions, 78 Mk-77 Firebombs, and over 22,000 rounds of 25mm from their GAU-12 Equalizer gun pods. In total, VMA-231 effectively delivered 1,692,000lb of munitions against enemy positions and equipment such as tanks, artillery pieces, and various Surface to Air Missile sites.

Following Desert Storm, VMA-231 returned to peacetime operations of training and supporting Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) deployments. In 1995, the Spades deployed aboard the USS *Kearsarge* with the 24th MEU(SOC) – SOC denoting Special Operations Capable. On this deployment, VMA-231 participated in the rescue of downed USAF Capt Scott O'Grady, after his F-16 was shot down over Bosnia. In the following years, VMA-231 also participated in Operation Allied Force, destroying targets in former Yugoslavia.

In 2003, VMA-231 once again answered the call and deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and the Global War on Terror. In 2007, VMA-231 was redeployed to Al Asad Airbase to continue supporting coalition forces in Iraq. The Ace of Spades completed 1,700 combat sorties and flew over 5,000 flight hours while in Iraq. As the Spades celebrated their 90th birthday in 2009, they deployed to Kandahar, Afghanistan, and flew close air support (CAS) missions in support of the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade during Operation Enduring Freedom.

As the Marine Corps entered the 2020s, they began the process of retiring the ageing Harrier fleet in favour of the F-35B Lightning II. In January this year, the Marine Corps announced final retirement plans for the remaining Harrier squadrons, with all Harriers retiring from service



◣ Plaques on the wall of the VMA-231 ready room tell tales of the squadron's rich history in past deployments

HARRIER II PLUS
500+HRS

▼ A VMA-231 pilot sporting a 500-hour patch getting ready for his upcoming flight

Maj J. T. "Casper" Grenier

◤ Grenier's AV-8B sits on the ramp ahead of its next flight

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◥ An AV-8B Harrier sits under the shelter while another taxies across the ramp

by late 2026. With the sundown of the last two squadrons on the horizon, VMA-231's final flight ceremony in the historic aircraft was set for late May, marking the end of an era as the squadron prepares to fully embrace the fifth-generation F-35B Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter as VMFA-231. Aviation News spent the day at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point just a few weeks before the Spades' final flight ceremony, witnessing the hard work and dedication of those attached to VMA-231.

Before scheduled flight ops, the author sat down with Maj Jason 'Casper' Grenier to discuss his time spent in VMA-231 flying the Harrier. Grenier, who has over 1,000 hours in the aircraft, has been with the squadron since 2019 and is a Weapons and Tactics Instructor. When asked about his experience flying and operating the Harrier, he said: "The rewarding thing is also the challenging thing about a Harrier. It is very hands-on; there's not a lot of computer help to fly the thing. There is an altitude hold, but that's as far as automation goes when it comes to flying the Harrier."

In terms of the ability of the Harrier, Grenier pointed out the aircraft's ability to provide CAS, stating: "It's hard to find pilots or a platform that is better at CAS than a Harrier... If you need someone who can go out there and do a CAS mission or some sort of low altitude mission; it's something we practice all the time and we're good at it."

Speaking on his time in VMA-231 and the squadron's lasting legacy, Grenier said: "[VMA-] 231 is the oldest, it's been around for over 100 years. We've had a lot of big names come through this squadron... We've been really good at being able to hold onto our heritage and a general pride in our unit."

One of the flights was a routine local sortie, but it was significant as it was the final flight for one of the aviators. As they reached the aircraft, the pilots greeted the hard-working Marines who maintain the jets and who had meticulously prepped them for flight. The pilots performed their preflight inspection and climbed into their ejection seats. They simultaneously brought their Harriers' engines to life, and the quiet breeze across the flightline was drowned out by that iconic Harrier whine as they completed their pre-taxi checks. The flight of two taxied onto the runway and did one last engine check, then the flight lead rolled down the runway. The pilot rotated the nozzles down and was airborne in seconds. Moments later, his wingman rocketed by, on his way to rejoin his flight lead off the departure end of the runway.

Upon return, the flight executed an overhead break above the field to enter the landing pattern. Once the lead Harrier crossed the runway threshold, he kicked the nose to the left and began to fly towards the VTOL pad. The pilot swiftly and effortlessly maneuvered the Harrier into a hover over the pad and slowly descended to the ground. Following a few post-landing checks, the pilot executed a pushup manoeuvre, in which he picked the aircraft back up

▼ A pilot manoeuvres his Harrier in a hover during a 360° turn before touching back down

into a hover and did a 360° stationary pedal turn before landing again. The Harriers then taxied back to the shelters, and it was time for the post-flight action. In this case, the post-flight was somewhat of a celebration, as this was the flight lead's final flight both in the Harrier and with VMA-231. As the pilot disembarked his AV-8B for the last time, he was greeted by his family and the rest of the Spades. He was immediately sprayed with water, a customary tradition for US Military Aviators' final flights.

After the pilot expressed his gratitude to the enlisted Marines for maintaining the jet and thus ensuring his safety while flying the past several years, the other pilots came to congratulate him. Surrounded by his squadron mates, he said flying jets was something he had dreamt of since he was a child.

As the day drew to a close, something that Grenier had said about the sundowning of VMA-231's Harriers stuck with the author: "If you could tell me that I can fly the same aircraft with the same people for the next ten years, I would do that… I would do that in a heartbeat." **AN**

The author would like to thank the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing COMMSTRAT team, 1st Lt Stoner, and 2nd Lt Jones, for their time and Maj Grenier and the rest of the dedicated men and women of VMA-231 for their hospitality.

▲ A Harrier taxies back to the parking shelters as its pilot completes his final flight in the type and with VMA-231

◣ An AV-8B sits on the VTOL pad before taxiing back into parking. The Harrier is one of the few aircraft in the USMC Inventory that is permitted to taxi with the canopy open

▼ Getting sprayed down with water is a tradition in military aviation as pilots finish out their careers or move on to different airframe types

Eglin's aggressors

In an age where fifth-generation fighters dominate the skies, the need for realistic and demanding air combat training has never been greater. ***Jacob Warye*** visits the company stepping into this critical role, Top Aces

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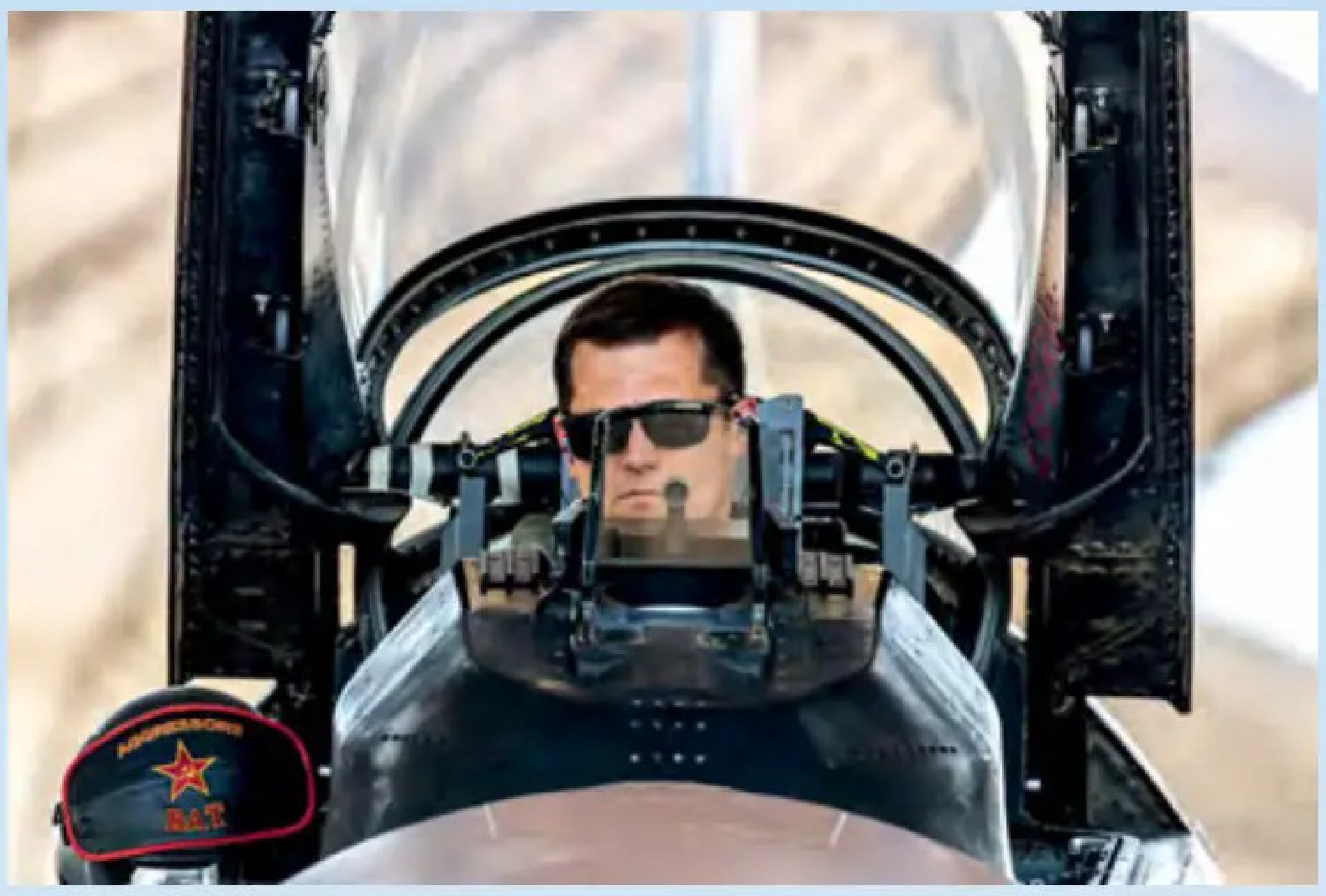
12-30
Marcus Miller

Top Aces Corp., the US entity of Canadian defence contractor, Top Aces Inc., has swiftly become a global leader in advanced adversary air (ADAIR) training services. From its modest beginnings in 2000, Top Aces has grown into a powerhouse in the field, with its recent operations at Eglin Air Force Base (AFB), Florida, marking a new era in air combat readiness.

Founded by a team of former fighter pilots, Top Aces was born from a simple yet powerful idea: to deliver high-fidelity air combat training using real aircraft flown by experienced aviators. This vision became reality as the company expanded globally, providing support to various allied air forces.

A pivotal moment in its evolution was their proprietary development of the F-16 Advanced Aggressor Fighter (AAF) from their privately owned collection of upgraded F-16A/B Netz aircraft formerly operated by the Israeli Air Force.



◄ Top Aces has six dedicated full-time pilots and a further four who are part-time operating the F-16AAF at Eglin

In 2020, Top Aces acquired 29 F-16A/B Netz aircraft and following rigorous demilitarisation and system upgrades, in 2021 some aircraft were reborn as F-16AAFs. There is also potential to convert up to 20 more into the full AAF configuration, depending on client interest. With the strong demand from the US, allied, and partner forces, continued expansion appears likely.

Each F-16AAF has been retrofitted and modernised with Top Aces' proprietary Advanced Aggressor Mission System (AAMS). This includes active electronically scanned array (AESA) radar,

Опыт Важен
TOP ACES
N857TA

▼ **A Top Aces F-16AAF, N857TA taxies towards the active runway at Eglin AFB, Florida** All images of Jacob Warye unless stated

▲ As well as pilots, Top Aces has a team of roughly 25 professionals at Eglin AFB

infrared search and track (IRST) systems, Thales Scorpion helmet-mounted cueing system, the AFRL-developed AgilePod, which can host over 30 different missionised payloads and Link-16 datalink capability.

The F-16's proven versatility, combined with the AAMS's open architecture, allows the fleet to carry a wide array of pods. The aircraft are certified by both the FAA and USAF to operate with electronic attack pods such as the ALQ-131, ALQ-188, ALQ-184, and the Airborne Combat Training System (ACaP). As well as legacy and modern Air Combat Maneuvering Instrumentation (ACMI) pods, the P4 and P5. Top Aces inventory includes Northrop Grumman's OpenPod infrared search and track (IRST) system. Another particularly exciting development is the integration of the industry's only scanning long-wave (LW) IRST system, fully embedded into the aircraft's mission system. This advanced sensor can track multiple infrared targets simultaneously and is specifically tailored for fifth-gen air-to-air debriefing needs. Chief Test Pilot and F-16 Test Program Manager, Christopher 'Bluce' Wee said: "The first two flights of the pod occurred in July 2024, after which we carried out further integration with Leonardo and Northrop Grumman before reinstalling it on the jet permanently." According to Wee: "Initial testing showed very promising results, and we are ready to apply our organic, out-of-band, passive targeting capability in USAF training operations."

In parallel with physical enhancements, Top Aces has developed a Constructive Wingman capability, a synthetic addition to live training that allows virtual adversaries to be integrated without the need for additional aircraft. This innovation adds a new layer of complexity to live-fly scenarios.

Strategic Location, Strategic Advantage

Eglin AFB, home to the 33rd Fighter Wing is not just another airbase; it is a hub of innovation and preparedness and a cornerstone of the USAF's training infrastructure. The base's advanced capabilities, augmented by the expansive airspace over the Gulf of Mexico, provides a dynamic environment for complex manoeuvres and a top location for ADAIR operations. Its proximity to test ranges and mission planning centres further supports realistic, full-spectrum training which is through Air Combat Command's Combat Air Forces Contracted Air Services (CAF CAS) contract. Due to the five-year contract, which was awarded in 2022 for Top Aces to provide ADAIR at Eglin and Luke AFB in Arizona, Top Aces' F-16AAFs are integrated into training exercises. The F-16AAFs are often pitted against F-22s and fifth-generation F-35As, sharpening the skills of frontline pilots.

Most importantly, the base enables close collaboration with USAF personnel, ensuring

◢ Callsign 'Bat' checks his F-16AAF during a pre-flight walk around

▼ A single F-16AAF taking off from Eglin AFB with an ADAIR mission over the nearby ranges on the pilot's task sheet

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As well as training the USAF, Top Aces also contribute to large-scale exercises like Sentry Series, Checkered Flag, Black Flag, and Red Flag, as well as joint operations with the USMC and USN

dynamic mission planning and bespoke adversary support tailored to specific training requirements, strengthening the mutual bond.

Milestones

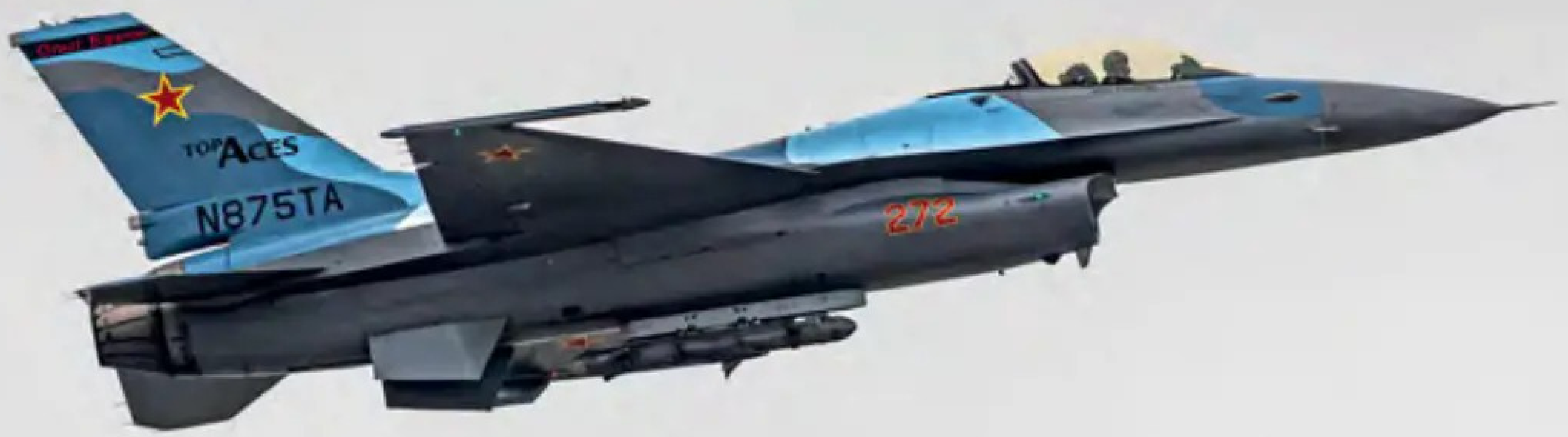
At Eglin, a dedicated team of around 25 professionals in operations, maintenance, and support keep the three F-16AAFs based at Eglin mission-ready daily. At the time of writing, Top Aces has six dedicated full-time pilots and a further four who are part-time operating the F-16AAF at Eglin.

Since initiating operations at Eglin, the Top Aces F-16AAF team and aircraft have flown over 1,800 training sorties, supporting a broad spectrum of USAF missions. Thanks to AAMS, the F-16AAF can replicate a wide variety of enemy profiles. This capability gives pilots an unparalleled training advantage, allowing for highly authentic and challenging engagements. Pilots have consistently praised the realism and complexity of these encounters, and the USAF continues to rely on Top Aces for elite-level support.

▲ A crew chief and F-16AAF pilot salute one another as the brakes are released for a mission ahead

FLANKER BLUE

Top Aces recently painted a second F-16 in *Flanker* Blue camouflage, currently based at Eglin to support operations. This distinctive paint scheme delivers a critical training advantage by realistically mimicking Russian Sukhoi aircraft such as the Su-27 or Su-35. It enhances Dissimilar Air Combat Training (DACT) by replicating the visual signature of real-world threats, improving pilot situational awareness and decision-making under pressure. The added realism strengthens cognitive recognition and forces aircrews to train against platforms that closely resemble actual enemy systems – without the cost of operating foreign aircraft.



The recently painted blue Top Aces F-16AAF departs Eglin AFB

Expansion

Top Aces has ambitious plans. In 2025, the company intends to grow in line with customer demand, expanding its role at Eglin and potentially operating from additional locations to support broader training and test missions.

The company is also actively pursuing multiple contracts to expand its ADAIR, training, and test footprint globally. With growing opportunities in the US, Europe, and beyond.

ADAIR and Beyond

Although the primary mission at Eglin falls under the CAF CAS ADAIR programme, centred on air-to-air engagements, Top Aces' scope of support is wide-ranging. They provide training for dissimilar basic fighter manoeuvres (DBFM), air combat manoeuvring (ACM), tactical intercepts (TI), offensive and defensive counter-air (OCA/DCA), and suppression of enemy air defences (SEAD). They also contribute to large-scale exercises like Sentry Series, Checkered Flag, Black Flag, and Red Flag, as well as joint operations with the USMC and USN.

Beyond training, Top Aces is in active discussions with the US Department of Defense and commercial test bodies to employ their F-16s for additional evaluation and development efforts, positioning them as an attractive partner for operational test and evaluation (OT&E) initiatives.

Adaptation

Top Aces is not content with simply keeping pace. The company's long-term vision includes continuous upgrades and operational expansion to meet evolving global threats. This forward-thinking approach ensures their training methodologies evolve in step with modern warfare.

Whether through sensor fusion, manned-unmanned teaming, or agile training frameworks, Top Aces is investing heavily to remain at the forefront. Their partnership with the US military is more than contractual – it is a shared mission to ensure air superiority through unmatched readiness.

TOP ACES
N854TA
129

As the company grows and innovates, its presence at Eglin may serve as a blueprint for other bases seeking state-of-the-art adversary support. In doing so, Top Aces is not only enhancing readiness but also helping to shape the future of air combat training.

For a new generation of pilots preparing for the battlespace of tomorrow, the simulated "enemy" in the sky may well be a F-16 AAF – and that could make all the difference. AN

▲ Top Aces IRST pod being ground tested on one of the company's jets

◀ An up-close shot of the IRST pod

▼ In 2020, Top Aces acquired 29 F-16A/B Netz aircraft and following rigorous demilitarisation and system upgrades, the F-16AAF was born.

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Tri No More

Jose Salgueiro recounts the life of the now almost extinct tri-jets in the world of commercial aviation

PAN AM
N514PA
PAN AM
Clipper White Falcon

With the end of World War II, the world began to reconnect through tourism and trade, and all the resources previously allocated for military purposes were redirected towards the development of new civil projects. To keep production levels high, manufacturers were forced to think of new aircrafts to transport tourists and luggage instead of soldiers and armaments. It was therefore natural that the first post-war commercial aircraft projects were developed and adapted from military aircraft such as bombers. However, at the beginning of the Jet Age, the available engines, derived from military aviation, were not as reliable and generated only a fraction of the power of today's engines. Thus, to offer better performance and transport a larger number of passengers safely, the first jet commercial aircraft models were developed with four engines.

With the evolution of technology, following the success of pioneering models such as the four-engine De Havilland Comet IV and Boeing 707, aircraft manufacturers began to develop new aircraft designs. While the 1950s marked the beginning of the Jet Age, the following decades were characterised by innovation and the launch of tri-jets, wide-body jumbos, and supersonic commercial aircraft. As the market grew and technology advanced with the development of new jet engines, aircraft equipped with three engines emerged as an option to ensure greater safety, range, and performance compared to aircraft with only two engines, as well as a more economical alternative to four-engine aircraft, which consumed more fuel and required long runways to operate.

Beginning of an evolution

In January 1962, the British manufacturer Hawker Siddeley unveiled the first three-engine jet aircraft, the Trident, capable of carrying up to 110 passengers. The following year, Boeing launched

▲ Boeing 727 was the most successful tri-jet ever with a total of 1832 units built

◀ US airlines, like PAN AM were the primary operators of the Lockheed L1011 Tristar

All images Jose Salgueiro unless stated

▲ A total of 1,026 Tupolev TU-154 units were built, serving Soviet airlines and other flag carriers from Iron Curtain countries allied to the Soviet Union

what would become the most successful tri-jet in history. The Boeing 727, in its 100 version, was launched in February 1963, while its extended version, the 200 model, with a capacity of up to 190 passengers, was released in 1967, alongside the two-engine Boeing 737.

By that time, Boeing's production line offered its customers aircraft for short, medium, and long distances, with a single aisle design across all models and equipped with two, three, and four engines, respectively, capable of carrying between 100 and 200 passengers. However, by the end of the 1960s, while Europe and the Soviet Union competed for supremacy in supersonic passenger flight, Boeing launched the model that would elevate the world of commercial aviation to a new level. In response to an order from its major client, Pan American, Boeing launched the Jumbo 747 in February 1969, which was the first wide-body aircraft with two decks and two aisles, equipped with four engines, and capable of carrying up to 500 passengers. The Boeing 747 was way ahead of its time and far superior to the models available on the market at the time, including in cost. This significant disparity left a market gap to be filled by commercial aircraft manufacturers. The Boeing jumbo was very large and expensive compared to models available, and in this context, the first wide-body tri-jets emerged as more affordable alternatives for transporting between 250 and 350 passengers.

The early 1970s, or the Jumbo-Jet Age, was marked by the race to launch the first wide-body tri-jet for medium and long ranges. To compete with the Boeing 747, McDonnell Douglas launched the DC-10 in August 1970, while Lockheed's L-1011 Tristar made its first flight in November of the same year.

Behind the Iron Curtain

Meanwhile, behind the Iron Curtain, the Soviet manufacturer Tupolev launched its own tri-jet, the TU-154, with a transport capacity similar to the Boeing 727-200, while Yakovlev introduced the YAK-42, a larger version with more range than its predecessor, the YAK-40, which had been released in the mid-1960s. Soviet manufacturers did not compete directly with Western giants, but the subsidies and market reservation imposed by the state ensured that the Soviet state airline and airlines from other allied countries were equipped only with aircraft produced in the Soviet Union. As a result, although Soviet models were inferior in many aspects, 1,026 units of the TU-154, 1,011 units of the YAK-40, and 187 units of the YAK-42 were produced until production ended in the 2000s. At that time, the Soviet airlines opted for Western aircraft that were more economical and had better performance.

During a whole decade the competition between the two wide-body tri-jets remained intense until Lockheed prematurely ended the production of the L-1011 in 1984, after manufacturing 250 units. Before ceasing production of the DC-10 in the late 1980s, McDonnell Douglas launched what would become the largest tri-jet passenger aircraft ever produced, the MD-11.

▲ The last MD-11 ever built was delivered by Boeing to Lufthansa Cargo in 2000, after Boeing acquired by McDonnell Douglas in 1997

The American manufacturer began development of its new tri-jet in 1986, using the already-established DC-10 design as the base for the project. The MD-11's fuselage was essentially the same as the DC-10, with the addition of two new fuselage sections, increasing the MD-11's length by about 6m and its passenger capacity by 50 compared to the original DC-10 fuselage. McDonnell Douglas ended production of the DC-10 in 1989 after manufacturing 446 units, just as the first MD-11s were being delivered.

Endangered species

In 1997, Boeing acquired McDonnell Douglas, marking the main turning point for the extinction of tri-jets. As soon as it took control of its competitor, Boeing announced the end of MD-11 production, delivering the last aircraft to Lufthansa

▼ The defunct airline Continental Airlines replaced its McDonnell Douglas DC-10-30s with Boeing 767-400s on the long-haul routes before being acquired by United Airlines

Cargo in 2000, after producing 200 units. With the establishment of the duopoly between American Boeing and European Airbus, large commercial aviation was left with only two and four engine aircraft options, with the classic Boeing 747 being the largest aircraft model available at the time. In the early 2000s, Airbus announced the launch of the "super-jumbo" A380, and to avoid falling behind in the competition for the new market of aircraft capable of carrying over 500 passengers, Boeing subsequently announced the stretched and modernised version of the classic jumbo, the Boeing 747-8. In this new phase of the commercial aviation market, it became clear that aircraft equipped with three engines no longer had a place.

In 2020, the global pandemic hit tourism and commercial aviation hard, causing the suspension of thousands of flights and the bankruptcy of several airlines. Numerous aircraft were grounded at airports worldwide, and others were returned, especially those with higher operational costs. Airlines chose to keep two-engine aircraft in operation and suspend operations of those with three and four engines, which consumed more fuel and had higher maintenance costs. To overcome the greatest crisis in commercial aviation history, airlines were forced to adjust their fleets, which sealed the final fate of the tri-jets. The 727, DC-10, L-1011, and MD-11 were retired in large numbers, and the few remaining aircraft are used as cargo planes or in firefighting operations.

In the commercial aviation market, the fuel used in aircraft accounts for about 30% of an airline's operational costs. Therefore, manufacturers are constantly seeking to develop new, more efficient aircraft that consume less fuel, have greater transport capacity, and more range, so that airlines can achieve the necessary profit to compete in the market and stay alive. In the harsh reality of this highly competitive market, there is no longer room for obsolete aircraft, and thus, the few remaining tri-jets are running out of time. The good news is that FedEx, the largest cargo airline in the world, had recently announced that it will keep its remaining MD11s in operation until 2032, extending the previously scheduled retirement date by four more years. Until then, we will continue to have the pleasure of seeing the beautiful tri-jets crossing the skies. AN

Some Lockheed L1011 Tristar aircraft were converted to cargo versions before being retired

▼ FedEx Express, the world's largest cargo airline was – and continues to be – the largest operator of the McDonnell Douglas MD-11, having operated a total of 82 aircraft in its fleet and currently maintaining 24 units still in service Aviation News

Varig replaced its old McDonnell Douglas DC-10-30s with MD-11s starting in 1991 and operated a total of 26 units, including some formerly operated by Swissair. Here are the airline's DC-10 and MD-11, shot in the exact same position, exactly ten years apart

A USAF C-17 Globemaster II leaves a dust storm behind after lifting from the dry lake bed in the desert Camden Thrasher

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Tom's Tiger

For Thomas

The family and friends of **Thomas Castle**, who lost his life in 2019, are working to ensure his name lives on to inspire young aviators and to promote vintage aviation. Jamie Ewan tells the story of the Thomas Castle Aviation Heritage Scholarship

“CONTACT!” The shout echoes across the hallowed grass of Sywell Aerodrome, and is almost instantly followed by the snarl of three Gypsy Majors. There’s a sense of excitement as the trio of Tiger Moths burst into life – their props eagerly biting the warm evening air.

Soon all three are snaking their way to the runway, the setting sun turning them golden as they go, while in each of the cockpits an instructor and a student go through their checks. It’s one of those moments. What’s that saying? “Ah… de Havilland!”

Led by a beautiful scarlet red and black machine, carrying the registration G-ANTE in silver and the name ‘Tom’s Tiger’ in gold on the nose, the others chase it into rural Northamptonshire’s orange skies. ‘Tango-Echo’ isn’t just any Tiger Moth; for one man – Ian Castle – it’s the legacy of a son taken too soon. For me, it represents the type my grandfather flew, the roots of my aviation passion.

Before long, the trio appear overhead in a neat ‘Vic’ formation. Ian nods approvingly – it’s a special way to end an epic day of scholarship flying – and few people know more about the classic biplanes

▲ 'Tom's Tiger', the heart and soul of the Trust – de Havilland DH.82a Tiger Moth G-ANTE airborne out of Sywell last year ALL IMAGES TCAHS UNLESS STATED

than Ian. Behind his quiet, friendly demeanour lies the heartbreak of losing his son, Thomas. But what defines Ian is the strength he gathers from that loss, using that energy in a positive way to help young pilots progress their vintage aviation ambitions.

The Trust

Tragically, Thomas, aged just 30, lost his life in an aerobatics training incident in August 2019. Ian established the Thomas Castle Aviation Heritage Scholarship (TCAHS) in his son's memory the following year. "I wanted to keep his legacy alive," he explains. "The Trust came about because Thomas was so enthusiastic about everything aviation – particularly all things vintage. The thought was to form a Trust around 'Tango-Echo', which was effectively his aeroplane, and give people around his age the chance to fly a vintage aircraft.

"I've been involved with vintage aviation for more than 30 years – and the Tiger Moth for just as long. Thomas was never afraid to ask questions, had an insatiable willingness to learn and perfect his craft, and would go to great lengths to research and teach himself."

G-ALIW
G-ANTE
G-AMTV

▲ A typical scene at Sywell when the Trust is flying with three of its former Royal Air Force Tigers on duty (from right: G-ALIW, ex-R5006; 'Tango-Echo', ex-T6562; and G-AMTV, ex-N6545) NIGEL HARRISON

Thomas soon became a regular visitor to Sywell with his father, so much so that according to Simon Wilson, an instructor pilot with the Trust, "if they weren't together, the other was close by!"

With Ian rebuilding, operating and maintaining numerous Tigers under his Classic Sport Engineering banner, Thomas was given many opportunities to fly: "He really caught the flying bug," smiles Ian. "He got his PPL in 2017 and learned to fly 'Tango-Echo' soon after. It was then owned by a group here that was kind enough to let him to fly it when he wanted." Before long, if 'Tango-Echo' was out at Sywell, Thomas wasn't far away. Ian said: "He used to spend huge amounts of time maintaining and cleaning it – pretty much every day he could, he'd be with the Tiger..."

Recognising the charismatic biplane's significance to Thomas, the group gifted him a small share. "Before I knew it, he wanted to buy it outright from the owners, which they had agreed to," says Ian. Thomas began working on 'Tango-Echo' in 2012 – five years later he soloed in that very aeroplane.

Trust stalwart Andrew Rawlings remembers that day: "It was one of those difficult solos – everyone knew it was happening but him. When he landed, you've never seen a happier bloke – he couldn't contain himself. He was absolutely buzzing!"

"Any chance to get up in it, he took," adds Simon. "His love for the Tiger was huge – I'd never fully realised what an incredible and important aeroplane it was until Thomas showed me. Now, with more than 300 trips in them, it's up there as one of my favourites."

Significantly, Andrew reminds us that Thomas wasn't just in it for himself. He was happy to devote time to help, share his knowledge and point friends in the right direction. It was at Sywell that Thomas struck up a close friendship with the late Richard Grace of Air Leasing/Ultimate Warbird Flights fame. As a result, he went on to work on several of that company's projects – including the Spitfires, Mustang and Thunderbolt in the Ultimate Warbirds stable.

Richard describes Thomas as one who "strived for perfection in every field and achieved everything due to hard work and understanding", adding: "He was as much an engineer as he was a pilot; a rare combination." Richard believes Thomas would ultimately have gone on to fly warbirds.

I only knew Thomas for about a year, but his passion for the Tiger was evident. Listening to him discussing the type's characteristics and history was fascinating, inspiring me to order a copy of Alan Bramson's *Tiger Moth Story.* At that point, I did not seriously imagine I'd fly a Tiger myself – the fact that I've done so is entirely thanks to the TCAHS and its quest to introduce younger people to vintage aviation.

Next generation

You only need to have your head turned by the snarl of a Spitfire's Merlin engine to realise that vintage aviation remains an enduring passion for many. However, those *involved* in the upkeep of such

▶ Some of the TCAHS team brief the day's flying at Sywell. From left, they are: instructor pilots Simon Wilson and Danny Williams, Ian Castle – the man whose vision makes it happen, and Tilly Watts, a 2024 scholar recipient NIGEL HARRISON

TCAHS
G-AMTV

▼ Ian Castle, in red, welcomes the 2024 scholar recipients on the first day of their training at Sywell last year – their initial steps into the world of vintage aviation. 'Tango-Victor' is one of the aircraft made available to the Trust by its owner, John Scurr NIGEL HARRISON

◀ A wonderful aerial study of 'Tom's' Tiger'. For many, the Tiger Moth gives them their first tentative steps into the world of vintage aviation

evocative machines face a double-edged sword: as the aircraft get older, so in general do those flying them. Organisations striving to provide opportunities for younger aviators in this specialist field are few.

While vintage aviation offers a rich narrative and a deep connection to the roots of flight, attracting a younger generation involves overcoming several challenges – shifts in technology, cultural attitudes, economics and lifestyle preferences, as well as an apparent lack of interest, or chances to connect with history in a meaningful way. That's before you take into consideration the often eye-watering costs involved. Such opportunities are, to put it mildly, hard to come by.

"We often talk about where the next generation of warbird pilots is coming from," says Simon. "There's very little out there to get younger people into vintage aviation – most nowadays want to go down the airlines route, but there's a whole other world of flying out there. The Trust allows those first steps into that world."

Now operating in their sixth year, Thomas Castle scholarships are established and respected across the vintage aviation community.

"Each recipient receives five hours of instruction on the Tiger here at Sywell," explains Ian. "However, flying is just one aspect of the syllabus. Like Tiger pilots, Tiger engineers are a vanishing breed. Fostering engineering and aircraft husbandry skills, as well as an understanding and empathy for both airframe and engine, are of equal importance to the continued operation of historic aircraft.

"Tasks such as cleaning and post-flight inspection increase a pilot's understanding of their aircraft and ensure there are no nasty surprises the next time they fly. Knowledge is absorbed by osmosis, not just in a classroom."

It's a view that Richard Grace clearly endorses: "Truly immersing oneself in aviation is near a necessity if you wish to succeed within the industry. Unfortunately, it was not until after Thomas' death that I first flew a Tiger and came to realise what a fantastic aircraft it is. It represents a truly fantastic route into vintage aviation. The aircraft is rewarding to fly because to get the most out of it you must understand its every idiosyncrasy and how every element of it works."

First-hand knowledge

Having volunteered with TCHAS for several years now, I've been lucky enough to fly the Tiger. Once airborne, the open cockpit gives you an exhilarating sense of freedom. It makes the sky feel closer, the wind feels louder over the hum of the engine, and every turn feels like a step back in time. In fact, it's a culture shock, especially in an era of automation – but it fits the purpose it was designed for. There's a pure connection between pilot and aeroplane.

There's no starter, no stall warner, no flaps, no canopy or brakes. In a Tiger, flying becomes an art, not a science. It requires a hands-on, immersive approach. The minute you stop doing everything you need to fly the aeroplane, it lets you know about it. As the adage goes: "It's easy to fly, but hard to fly well!"

Scholarship recipient Micheal Tolley sums it up well: "To me, the Tiger is the aeroplane equivalent of a tall ship adventure – canvas on sail, the wind in your face and just enough wood and metal to hold everything together."

To date, nearly a dozen scholarship recipients have soloed the Tiger, thanks to TCAHS. "It's amazing being able to introduce someone to 'proper flying'," comments Simon. "Taking them up for their first flight in a Tiger and seeing the huge grin on their face when we're back on the ground is something else!"

Among them is George Gibb – a 2024 TCAHS recipient. He says: "It's such an incredible aeroplane to have the honour to fly – it takes you right back to the basics." Another is James Shenton: "The Trust is not only an organisation that makes your dreams come true, but one where you make friends for life. It's full of dedicated and friendly people who go out of their way to support and help you with your journey. We need more things like this as it's inspiring younger people into vintage aviation and keeping these incredible aeroplanes alive."

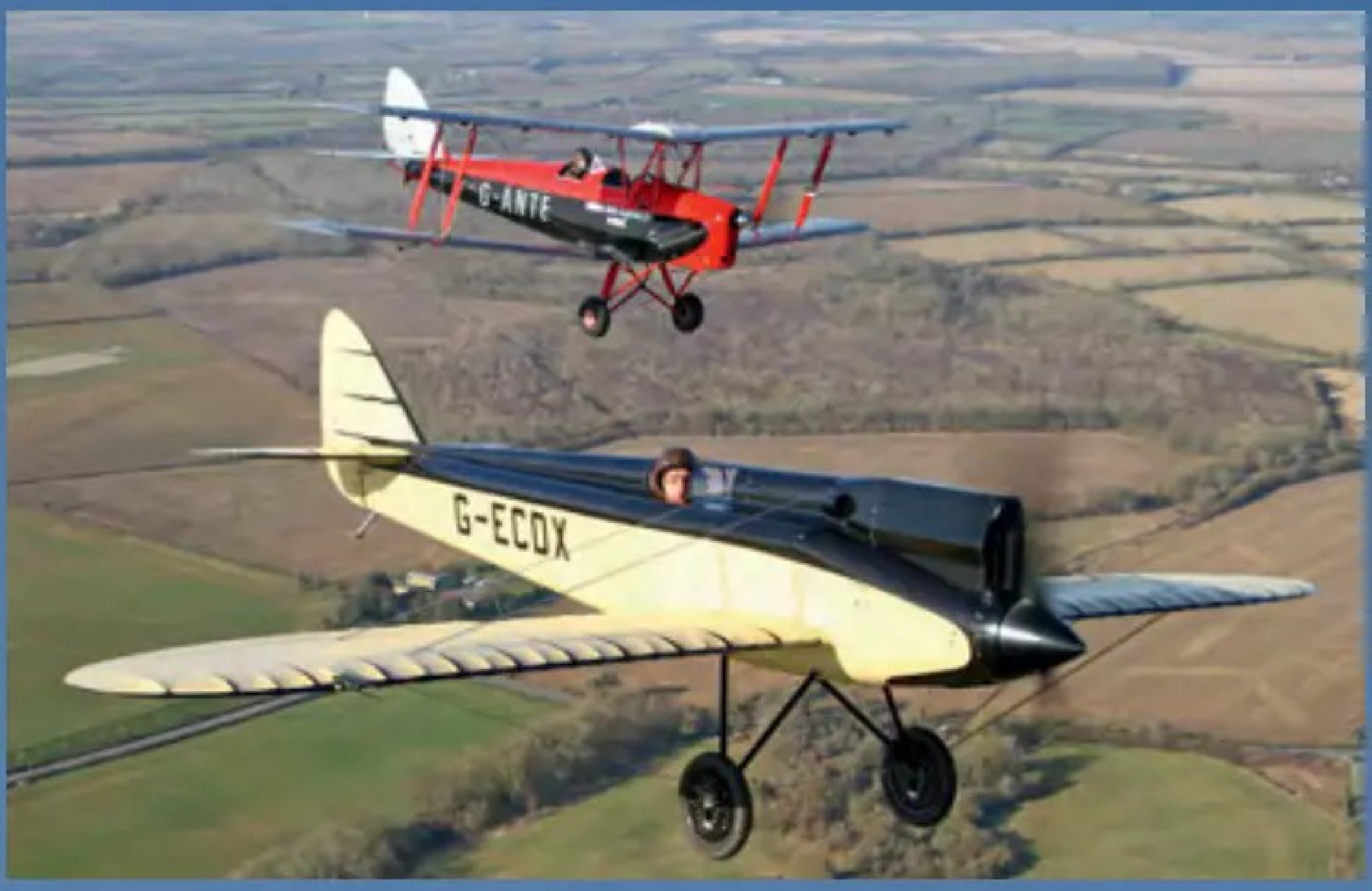
As Ian points out, these scholarships are for young aviators with a serious desire to get involved in the vintage aviation world: "We're looking for people who want to take this sport or this industry forward like Thomas wanted to," he explains.

"It's vitally important to foster that enthusiasm in people and encourage them to look after these aeroplanes, as well as behind the scenes at the operation, constraints and safety needed, to keep them flying. We're keen to find people who want to get involved with the aeroplane, as opposed to just flying it. Everyone joins in across the organisation."

I have been taught how to 'prop swing' – a skill I

▼ Tiger, Tiger, burning bright! The iconic lines of a Tiger Moth on final to Sywell caught against the burnt orange skies of Northamptonshire at the end of the day's scholarship flying NIGEL HARRISON

▶ The Trust was able to capture what is believed to be the first-ever images of both Tiger Moth variants together – at least in UK skies – while helping Steve Jones deliver his beautiful DH.71 to its new home at Old Warden on March 4, 2025.



▼ 'The Tiger Grin' – George Gibb beams from the cockpit of 'Tango-Echo' following his first solo in the indomitable de Havilland type

▼ Adorned in their traditional red polo shirts, TCHAS groundcrew, from right, twins Scott and Alex Munnouch, along with the author, get ready to launch G-ANTE, G-ALIW and G-AMTV for an evening sortie from Sywell NIGEL HARRISON

Tom's Tiger
BROOKLANDS AVIATION LTD SYWELL
G-ALIW

can help pass on to the next generation. At present, some 15 scholars are actively involved across the Trust's activities – both in the air and on the ground, including Brad Simpson: "This is much more than flying. As scholars we are encouraged to continue our association behind the scenes, allowing us to understand and develop the skills needed to not only fly the aircraft, but operate and maintain them, too. It really is a fantastic way for young people to get involved."

It's a sentiment shared by Tilly Watts, a 2024 scholar recipient: "I had such an amazing time last summer getting my first taste of vintage flying. Now part of the team, it's been a great foundation for my future in vintage aviation."

Shortly after completing his scholarship, Micheal Tolley said: "For someone whose PPL training was on 'training-wheel' aeroplanes, the opportunity to get stuck in with these old 'girls' was simply amazing. The scholarship is defined by overwhelming positivity, support and camaraderie among the team – I felt that I was in just the right place to grow my experience as an aviator. Marvellous aeroplanes, great people and a fantastic time."

Helping hands

Over the years, numerous airshow and warbird pilots have been involved with the Trust, too. "They recognise what it is we are trying to do," nods Ian. "The transfer of knowledge is key to this."

Testament to how well respected Ian and Thomas are, and the esteem in which today's scholarship programme is held, is the amount of organisations and former customers providing support.

Among them are Little Gransden-based Vintage Engine Technology (better known as 'Vintec'), the Light Aircraft Association, de Havilland Support, Audley End-based Vintage Fabrics, Henstridge's Aircraft Coverings and Sharmin Avionics – as well as the de Havilland Educational Trust.

"The latter provides both support and funding for the scholarships as well as the use of its Tiger Moth, G-TIGA," says Ian. "Their goals are the same as ours – getting younger people involved in vintage aviation to develop their flying and engineering skills. As a result, that aircraft is now operated by the Trust and kept at Sywell."

The Trust has received no shortage of enthusiasm and support from the Sywell community itself. The night photography shoots it organises at the airfield have been particularly well received, as was a special and thankfully sun-kissed Open Day on April 26.

"I find what we are doing very emotional," Ian concludes. "But in the same breath, it's hugely rewarding – to see 'Tom's Tiger' in a way that honours him, doing what he would have wanted to do within the vintage aviation community… it's a lot of what keeps me going. To lose your business partner, your best mate and your son all in one fell swoop is tough, but if we can give something back to vintage aviation, then Thomas will never be forgotten."

- To find out more about the Thomas Castle Aviation Scholarship Trust, its scholarships or how to book a Tiger Moth flight experience (proceeds support the Trust's work) see: www.tcah.co.uk

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592/25

Safe, luxurious and sporty

The Piper M600 was the top model of Piper's M-Class family until 2024, when the M700 Fury was announced. *Jakub Śliwiński* and *Filip Modrzejewski* jumped aboard the M600 to discover why the aircraft is so successful worldwide

▲ Climbing to FL280 takes only 20 minutes and the aircraft can reach a cruise speed of up to 274 KTAS (knots true airspeed) thanks to its 600SHP engine (PT6A-42A) All images Filip Modrzejewski unless stated

SP-NEE was ordered with a striking and bespoke paint scheme in black, along with black components such as exhaust pipes, spinner and landing gear. It is equipped with a wide range of features, such as an Iridium satellite phone (as part of the Garmin avionics – GSR56 module), which allows the pilot to make telephone calls (using the aircraft's headphones), send text messages or receive data such as TAFs, METARs or high-resolution radar images, which are shown on the displays.

On board

The aircraft boasts beautifully designed but also very functional details – in addition to drink holders for everyone, there are USB sockets and even a 230V socket which the owner can use to charge his laptop while he is flying on business. In the cockpit, you immediately notice the very practical armrest, which contains a special compartment for the control panel of the active noise-cancellation headphones. Anyone who has been bothered by this panel dangling with cables during a flight will understand how functional this is.

When the master is switched on, the PFD display of the Garmin G3000 system lights up – this class of avionics is usually only available on small jets. The M600 is one of very few GA aircraft fitted with this class of avionics as standard from the factory. The engine start procedure takes just a moment – fuel pump, spark plugs, starter button and at 13%, fuel is injected. Everything else is taken care of by the computer and pilots just monitor the temperatures to ensure they are rising appropriately. Next, the pilot in command switches on the rest of the avionics and the M600 is ready for flight.

M600/SLS
SP-NEF

Let’s fly

The M600 taxies with practically no brakes – to do this, you set the throttle to the BETA position (also referred to as semi-reverse), which makes the propeller create a huge aerodynamic disc and momentarily brakes the aircraft. This cannot be used in the air – it is protected and activated by the ‘weight on wheels’ sensors. When flying, to reduce speed, a pilot simply reduces the power to IDLE and the propeller, by changing the angle of attack which allows the aircraft to decelerate even during descent. This can also come in handy in the air, as the aircraft has no airbrakes (unlike the M350, for example). The speed it achieves on descent is 250kts, which is impressive compared to the M500, its ‘younger’ brother, with its Vne of 189kts. A pilot would highly appreciate being able to fly at this speed, saving unnecessary holding at large traffic airports, where the controller usually lets passenger aircraft proceed faster to landing. Before take-off, there is an engine test, which in this aircraft is limited only to checking the propeller clamping system.

Compared to a Cessna T206, which has rotation speeds of 54kts, the M600’s is 85kts. The Cessna should lift off faster, but nothing could be further from the truth. The author was really surprised by the acceleration on take-off. The landing gear picked up the unevenness of the grass strip very comfortably and we reached the rotation speed practically at the same point in the strip as the T206. After retracting the landing gear and reducing power, despite the climb, the aircraft continued to accelerate very smoothly.

At this point, the climb rate on the display oscillates around 2000ft/min and, thanks to the pressurised

M600/SLS
SP-NEE
HALO

This aircraft is a great step up for any pilot or private owner from a younger brother M350 (with piston engine). The main competitor is Daher TBM 960, but its main selling point is faster speed that comes with a higher price

HALO
EQUIPPED

◀ Piper's HALO Safety System was introduced in the M600 model and it was the first aircraft in the world equipped with Garmin Autoland that can direct the aircraft to the airport and perform a fully automated landing if the pilot is incapacitated

cabin, crew and passengers do not experience the usual ear blockages. It takes only 20 minutes to climb to FL280, and the M600 can reach FL300.

After a while we reached an altitude of 4,000ft, the autopilot was disconnected and the pilot let me take over the controls. The forces on the rudders are high but they work with surgical precision. I noticed that even a small change in power made it necessary to trim the plane, but after a while I got used to it. It was surprising how smooth the flight of this aircraft is and credit goes to the completely new wings than on the M500.

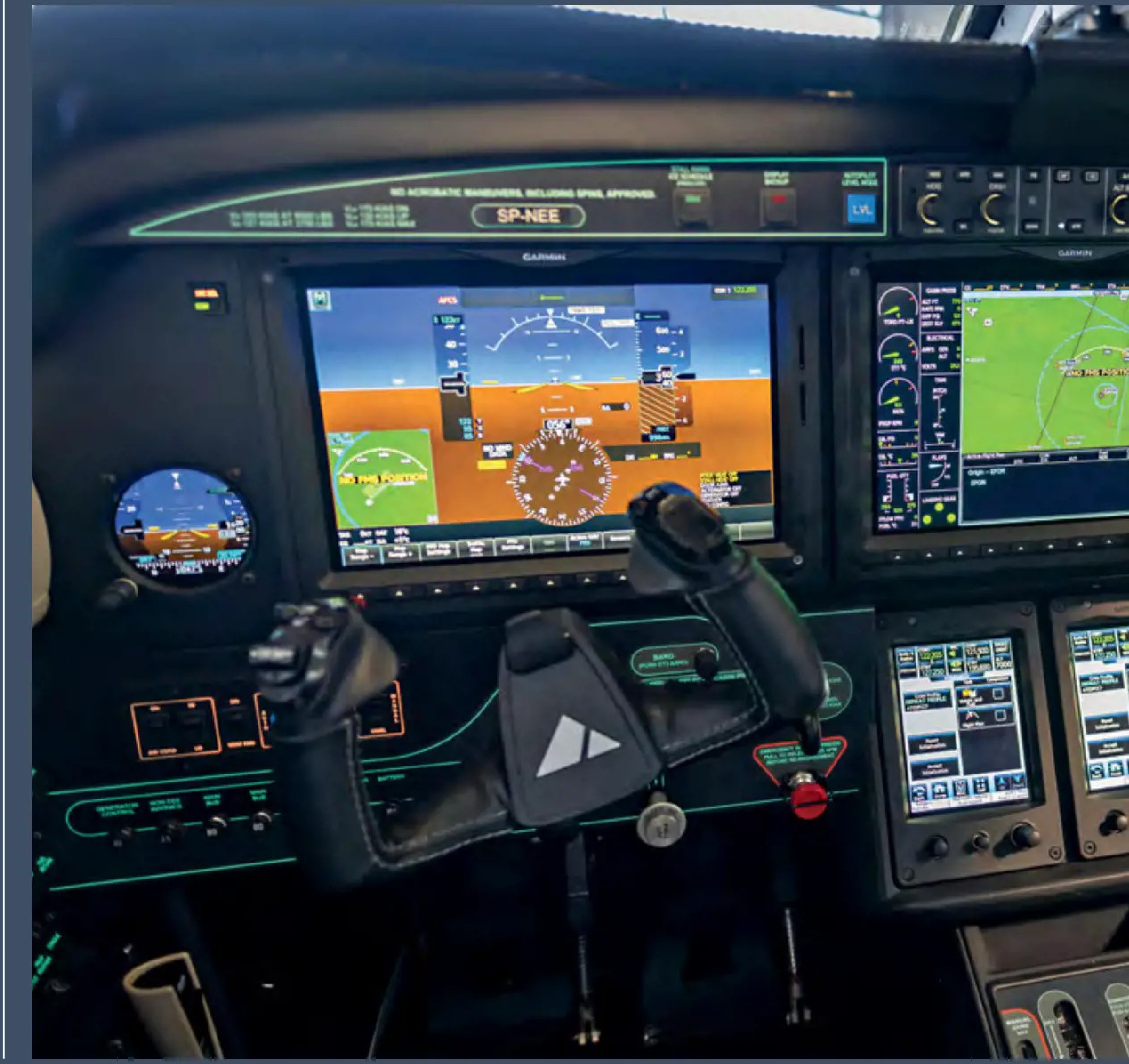
Air superiority

After the author handed back the controls, the pilot increased the power and accelerated from 130 to 220kts with the 600SHP under the hood bringing the power. Conspicuous on the instrument panel is a big 'magic' blue button. When pressed, this returns the aircraft to level flight even from the most unlikely configuration. The M600 has other safety systems, such as help with too high angle of roll – if a pilot rolls more than 45°, the plane warns you with a thump of the volant and returns to a smaller roll on its own.

Yet more possibilities

The equipment that most significantly enhances safety is the Autoland system. This brings the aircraft to the ground when, for various reasons, the pilot cannot do so. The system can be activated by the passenger by pressing a dedicated and easily accessible button. It is, of course, adequately protected against being accidentally pressed.

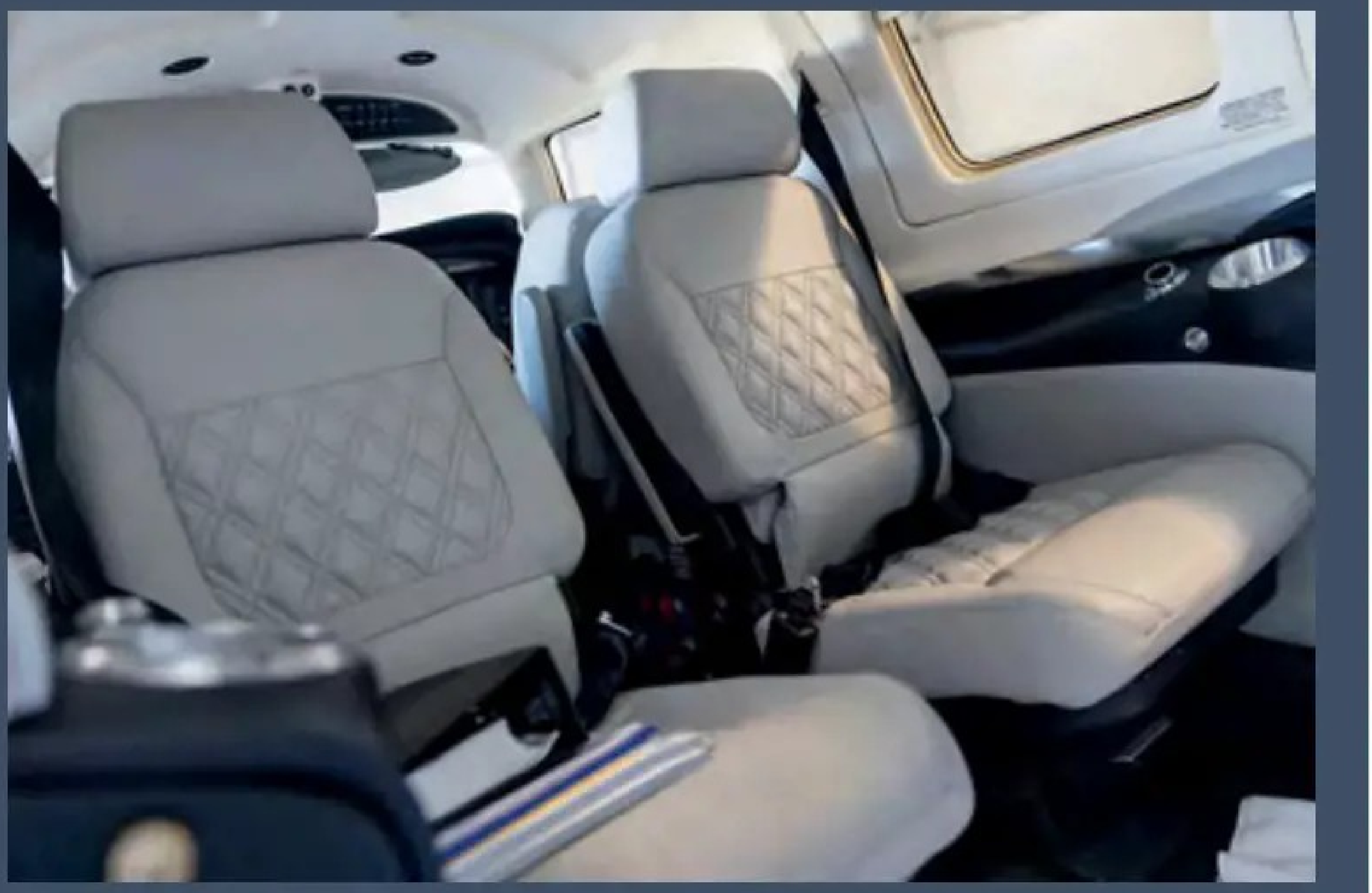
There is also a second option – Autoland can be activated automatically by the system. This is thanks to the pilot's hypoxia detection function. Each time the pilot flies on autopilot above an altitude of 14,000ft, the system checks the pilot's response to the system's commands by periodically asking him to insert his finger into the pulse oximeter built into the instrument panel. If the pilot does not respond, the system initially lowers the flight altitude and if the



pilot still does not respond, it initiates a full landing. Garmin selects the most optimal airport in the area and directs the aircraft there. Special systems are designed to avoid potentially dangerous terrain (mountains for example) along the way and, thanks to the radar built into the wing, bad weather, to safely navigate this route.

In addition to releasing the flaps and landing gear, the de-icing system is activated during this procedure in case of flying into the icing region. During the entire procedure, the system transmits appropriate messages via radio to inform air traffic control of its intentions and the current situation, as well as to warn other pilots in the area. After landing, the aircraft is braked and the engine automatically switched off. The system is equipped with under- and over-speed protection combined with auto-throttle. It starts its action of preventing speed reduction by increasing the power of the engines before it happens. Interestingly, the aircraft has a very wide green field range on the speed indicator – between 73 and 251 KIAS (knots indicated airspeed).

▲ Piper has the designator SLS, which stands for Safety Luxury Sport. All the systems and equipment on board contribute to these, it's very snappy, yet stable flying characteristics make it a pleasant aircraft for pilots



◀ The cabin is fitted with four seats in a club arrangement (plus two more seats in front for crew) and is big enough for four people to travel comfortably and even do some work on the way. There are multiple configurations of the finishing materials and colours inside, with a mix of cream and black on this model

◀ M600 is equipped with Garmin G3000 avionics, which is normally only available on small jets. While it's an advanced system, it has tons of possibilities and helps in single pilot operations, making the aircraft fly very easily

Into the landing

Despite the speeds that the M600 can reach, in the circuit of a small GA airport, it can fly together with others at speeds oscillating around 110kts. The landing approach is performed using the visual option available in the Garmin G3000. The system itself 'draws' us a virtual approach path to the airport, to a specific runway and guides the autopilot. This is comparable to ILS (instrument landing system) approaches only without the appropriate infrastructure, or to RNAV (area navigation) without an official RNAV procedure.

Although the aircraft has reverse, the M600 can land using only the 'beta' disk mode, which is sufficient and still can make a stop after about 500m (the manufacturer declares slightly over 800m. SP-NEE is fitted with a five-blade Hartzell propeller, which is very impressive with its aggressive appearance when on the ground. During flight, thanks to the five blades, the propulsion system generates considerably less vibration and noise, which increases the comfort of both pilot and passengers. The propeller is constructed from carbon composite with a steel core in the centre. The leading edge is covered with a nickel-cobalt mesh with a special 'shield' to protect it from damage, a huge advantage for landings on unpaved runways. European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) certified landings on grass runways only in 2022, which has greatly expanded the operational capabilities of this aircraft.

Why the M600?

After the flight, the author asked what convinced the owner to buy the M600? "After three years of owning an M350, it was time for something new," he said. "The choice was quite simple as the M600 has no competition in its class. The only alternative was the [Daher] TBM 960, but its main selling point – speed – is not really enough to pay 50% more for."

The aircraft is equipped with pilot hypoxia detection – each time the pilot flies on autopilot above an altitude of 14,000ft, the system checks the pilot's pulse oximeter with the in-built sensor and if no response, Autoland is activated

▶ Autothrottle or autostart are a standard on M600 and, again, aids in support of Single Pilot Operations. The engine startup takes a short moment and the aircraft is immediately ready to fly. The 'BETA' mode of the propeller is very helpful in creating a big aerodynamic disk that can stop the aircraft on the ground, without the need to use brakes

Curious to know what was different from the M350, the owner explained it was mainly, but not exclusively, speed. "It's nice to see a ground speed above 300kts" he said. "Having made the switch from a piston engine aircraft to a turbine engine, the engine sound alone certainly makes a huge impression – the distinctive swishing is music to your ears. The avionics, i.e. the Garmin G3000, is also a huge leap compared to the G1000. Certainly, from a pilot's perspective, the benefits of the M600 could be listed at long length."

Despite the M700 being announced in 2024, the M600 is still an eye-catching asset for general aviators and business operators. The owner's pilot said: "With a full tank [1,750lb of fuel – almost a thousand litres] we could fly for five-and-a-half hours and still have the required reserve left. This guarantees us a range of more than 2,000km – most of Europe – on one tank. The big advantage is that we can fly without having to worry about the availability of JET A1 fuel at the airport and return home on a single tank."

When it comes to weight, the M600 performs well; on a full tank it has as much as 320kg available. On many planes with full tanks, an aircraft can barely take two passengers. Due to the balance of the aircraft, the luggage space is limited to 43kg, but in terms of dimensions, it is very generous and will accommodate sports equipment and large suitcases.

The M600's unique selling point is that you can take off from a local grass airfield and fly to the other side of Europe, which opens up a whole new world of possibilities. A comfortable flight, above-average performance and an unparalleled level of safety add up to make the M600 a game changer. It also lives up to its name, the M600 SLS: safety, luxury and sport. AN

SP-NEE awaits its passengers in the owner's hangar. Visible are the rear positioned steps into both the passenger cabin and the cockpit

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Griffons in

Joe Campion visited Canada's Tactical Aviation Detachment (TAD) of four CH-146 Griffon helicopters currently deployed to Latvia. We gain an insight to being deployed with the Griffon from a pilot and support perspective.

▼ Bell CH-146 Griffon of the Tactical Aviation Detachment flies to the FARP from Riga International Airport Simon Pearson-Cougill

Announced in late 2023 by Minister of National Defence, Bill Blair, Canada's tactical aviation capabilities were to be deployed persistently to Europe for the first time since the Bosnia and Kosovo conflicts in the late 1990s to early 2000s. This deployment was to strengthen the country's ongoing commitment to the NATO Multinational Brigade-Latvia (MNB-LVA) under Operation Reassurance. The minister announced that four Bell CH-146 Griffons would be sent in the summer of 2024, and CH-147 Chinooks would follow in the autumn of 2025.

Fast forward to July 2024, two RCAF CC-177s from 8 Wing, Canadian Forces Base Trenton, with four Griffons aboard touched down at Riga International Airport, Latvia. Those four helicopters and personnel come from 408 Tactical Helicopter Squadron (THS), 438 (THS), 430 THS, and 403 Helicopter Operational Training Squadron, all under the RCAF's 1 Wing.

Awaiting them at Riga was the personnel part of the

Europe

first TAD rotation, 'Roto 0' were ready to offload and reassemble the helicopters for the mission ahead. Roto 0 flew a total of 500.4 hours over 203 sorties. They were relieved by the next rotation of personnel, Roto 1 on November 23, 2024, when the rotation arrived via CC-330 Husky. Roto 2 is the current rotation and is led and force generated by 408THS but has augmentees from across 1 Wing including from 450THS, 438ETAH, and 400THS.

The Griffon is a highly versatile utility helicopter operated by Canada across multiple theatres since entering service in the 1990s. The Griffon was used extensively in Afghanistan on Operation Athena and Mali on Operation Presence providing aerial security and reconnaissance. In early 2024, 408 THS deployed with the Griffon to the Dominican Republic on Operation Globe, providing mobility of personnel and supplies in and out of the Canadian Embassy in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Now in Latvia, it serves as a platform to provide mobility, aerial firepower, and reconnaissance to the Brigade.

▲ The two Griffons land in formation and await the loading team to arm the helicopters prior to hitting the Adazi ranges Simon Pearson-Cougill

▼ A cockpit view of the two Griffons flying in formation over Latvia's capital Joe Campion

Getting a call

To discuss how the TAD works as a supporting force to the MNB-LVA, I sat down with Capt Bui, a CH-146 pilot from 408 THS. When it comes to receiving a call to get a Griffon helicopter airborne and in the required location, Bui said: "Brigade Units will request Helicopter support through the Brigade G3 Aviation, an Operations-Aviation liaison, that prioritises aviation tasks on behalf of the Brigade Commander. The task is approved by the Brigade Commander and accepted by the TAD Commander."

This will then all be passed to operations office within the TAD. Bui added: "After TAD Ops receives a task, it is delegated to the Aircrew Flight, which assigns an Air Mission Commander (AMC). The AMC then takes stock of the current situation, issues a Warning Order to the TAD, and co-ordinates with the user to determine the effects desired. The team then goes into mission planning, determining the best route, and any support that may be required. The AMC then takes the plan to the Commander for approval. After approval, the AMC issues Orders, prior to execution."

During our visit, the TAD supported Joint Terminal Air Controllers (JTACs) in the Adazi ranges for a live-firing training exercise at night. The JTACs on the range and working with the two helicopters were Spanish, Italian, Latvian, and Canadian. When asked what it was like to integrate with multiple nations on such a task, Bui responded: "As we all use procedures from the same NATO doctrine, the whole process was very seamless, giving us all confidence in our abilities to train and fight together."

The mission saw two Griffons, each with four Night Vision Goggle (NVG)-equipped aircrew onboard, two upfront and two aerial gunners in the rear cabin, depart in formation from the civilian airfield, Riga international. The two helicopters transited at 1500ft above sea level (ASL) in the dark to the forward arming and refuelling point (FARP), callsign GROUNDHOG. The FARP personnel helped arm the Griffons. They equipped the C6 general purpose machine gun capable of firing 650-1000 7.62mm rounds per minute to both sides of each aircraft.

As well as daytime missions, the TAD provides aerial support to the MNB-LVA during night-time operations Joe Campion

After being armed, the helicopters lifted together and headed to the range. When asked why the helicopters are armed at the FARP, Bui responded with: “It is to enable efficient flow into and out of the training area, maximising time on station for shooting qualifications.”

Now in the range area, and not in civilian airspace, the Griffons could fly close to the contours of the terrain, flying fast and tactically in the dark until called into position by the JTACs for a gun run and take out a simulated target such as armored vehicles and opposing fire. Roughly an hour-and-a-half later, all JTACs were qualified/re-qualified, and all four guns were empty. The two Griffons egressed the range and headed back to GROUNDHOG. The aircraft were then de-armed and flown back to Riga. It was then time for de-brief for the air crew to discuss potential lessons learnt on how to execute the mission in the future.

The TAD performs a lot of low-level tactical flying. With Canada known for its vast and variable landscape, Bui was asked how low-level flying in Latvia compared. He said: “The terrain is very similar to many training areas in Canada, and international aviation standardisation has made the transition to flying in Europe fairly quick. Our most used area is the Kadaga ranges, as our users use this area the most for training. As air assets, there are multiple airspaces around Latvia that allow low level flight. The use of these areas does require some more co-ordination than back home.”

▶ A rear Gunner fires the C6 general purpose machine gun capable of firing 650-1000 7.62mm rounds per minute. One was equipped to both sides of each aircraft Joe Campion

▼ A CH-146 Griffon flies low over one of the Frozen lakes enroute to the FARP. The temperatures in Latvia were sub-zero whilst flying with the door Simon Pearson-Cougill

▲ **Griffon crew fire up the helicopter at Riga International Airport for the mission ahead** Joe Campion

Always ready

Being on demand and ready for a mission received from the Brigade at any given time, the four Griffons need to have a high efficiency rate and be operational whenever the time comes. Those responsible are maintenance staff deployed for part of the rotation.

Maintenance officer Sgt Oliver Olea Gonzalez said: “I am proud to say that, to date, we have not missed a single mission sortie due to an unserviceability, even when it comes to providing backup aircraft. Based on this performance, I can confidently say that our efficiency rate is 100%.”

Before arriving in the country, the aircraft undergo a full audit to ensure that all components are in full working order and that no critical parts or items are close to expiration. This helps to avoid any issues once the aircraft arrive in theatre.

Gonzalez added: “We also conduct mission-specific training on equipment we will be using in theatre, such as weapon systems and countermeasures. As for integration, we primarily work closely with the army, as they are our primary customer for operational support.

The maintenance staff have dynamic daily duties that are aligned with the planned flight schedule for the day. Senior maintenance staff structure the two maintenance crews to ensure that aircraft are prepared for their scheduled launches, with a focus on preventive maintenance, inspections, and post-flight servicing.

Gonzalez told *Avnews*: “The day begins with the pre-flight inspections of the aircraft slated for flight. This includes towing the aircraft out of the hangar, refuelling, and servicing the aircraft. During this process, the crew chief cross-references maintenance records to verify that all previous work has been completed by the book. This includes ensuring that weight and balance adjustments are accurate, confirming proper maintenance certifications, and making sure that no upcoming inspections or component replacements will interfere with the aircraft’s readiness for flight. Once these checks are complete, the crew chief certifies the aircraft’s airworthiness and signs off on the weapon system release.”

When it comes to the aircraft that are not scheduled to fly, crew chiefs develop a plan for preventative maintenance on those non-flying aircraft, including the replacement of components that are nearing the end of its life cycle, as well as scheduled or unscheduled inspections. This proactive approach helps maintain the fleet’s overall operational readiness.

Asked what it is like to maintain aircraft when deployed rather than at homebase, Gonzalez explained: “Performing maintenance in a deployed theatre presents unique opportunities to collaborate with local partners and adapt to new environments. One of the key tasks is ensuring our tools remain calibrated in accordance with our Canadian Airworthiness Act. We’ve established valuable partnerships with local companies to perform necessary calibrations, which allows us to leverage their expertise and resources. While their capabilities may not cover the full range of tools we use, this situation encourages us to be resourceful and plan carefully to address any gaps in calibration or tool availability.

He added: “Deployments naturally bring an increased sense of purpose, which further motivates our technicians. Being in theatre

◢ **Crew of Roto 1 after landing from a mission supporting Joint Terminal Air Controller training in the Adazi Ranges** Joe Campion

◣ **The Canadian flag and the Multinational Division North patch seen on the pilots flying gear in the cockpit** Joe Campion

▲ Maintenance staff put away one of the four Griffon's deployed to Latvia after a day of missions Joe Campion

enhances their dedication to ensuring aircraft readiness, making sure they are always prepared for their tasks."

If parts are required for any of the aircraft, the usual process is to receive those parts via service flights from Canada, typically via CC-17. However, Gonzalez points out: "In situations where parts are needed as soon as possible, to meet operational requirements we initiate High Priority Requests (HPR). This is a process that ensures the fastest possible delivery of parts, often utilizing commercial shipping when time is of the essence."

Gonzalez added: "At the end of the day, we ensure that all aircraft are ready for the next day's operations. This includes addressing any unserviceability that may have arisen during the day and determining which aircraft are fit for flight the following day. Finally, the team carries out [a] routine hangar clean-up to keep our workplace safe and efficient."

The near future will be full of supportive taskings for the TAD within multiple Brigade-level and Brigade Sub-unit level exercises providing mobility, supporting logistics and troop movement, firepower, and aerial reconnaissance. Most recently, the TAD provided replenishment to troops on the ground in the large exercise Oak resolve. Also, the TAD are currently planning a move from Riga International Airport to Lielvārde Air Base to sustain long-term operations in the area. This is also where the TAD is expected to be augmented by a number of CH-147 Chinook helicopters.

As an aerial task force, the TAD is committed and dedicated to providing not just the standard missions it can with the CH-146, but also missions outside its core if called upon by NATO. As well as operating in Latvia, the TAD's Joint Operations Area also encompasses Estonia and Lithuania and is ready to integrate with any allied nation.

The Commander of the TAD at the time of our visit, Maj Shannon Brown made her thoughts clear about her personnel's commitment. She said: "I am immensely proud to lead this team of aviation professionals. Our tactical aviation logisticians, drivers, maintainers, signalers, clerks and aviators are the very best at what they do and being able to provide aviation effects as an integrated unit of the Multinational Brigade Latvia is an incredible privilege." AN

▼ Sgt Oliver Olea Gonzalez organises one of the many storage rooms within the TAD's hangar at Riga Joe Campion

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Oman Air plans for

profitability

Oman Air has ditched its strategy to emulate other Gulf carriers. A transformation should produce the first profits in a few years. **Richard Schuurman** investigates.

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Lufthansa

▲ Oman Air Airbus A330-200, A4O-DA arriving at Frankfurt Airport for the first time in 2009, the aircraft was operational with the airline until spring 2024
Bjoern Schmitt

It is 32 years this year since the Omani government announced its decision to exit Gulf Air and establish its own airline, Oman Air. In doing so, it followed the footsteps of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. However, whereas Qatar Airways and Emirates have become profitable global powerhouses, Oman Air has only produced losses that have accumulated to OMR 2.0bln (£3.9bn) since 2011. Between 2007-2023, the government through its 99.9% share via Oman Investment Authority has invested OMR 1.25bn in the carrier, which ended 2023 with OMR 1.6bn in long-term debt.

Its financial situation had become unsustainable. Hence the decision by the Minister of Transport and the airline's chairman, Saeed Bin Hamoud Al Maawali, to launch a thorough transformation in September 2023. It has a goal to get Oman Air on the road to profitability in four years, so by 2027-2028.

The man to lead this transformation is CEO Con Korfiatis, who was recruited by a headhunter and accepted the job in May 2024. He has been in the airline business for over 30 years with Ansett, Singapore Airlines, Qantas and Jetstar Asia, VIVA Macau, Garuda, and until late 2023 as the founding CEO of flyadeal, the low-cost start-up of Saudia.

Analysis

Chairman Al Maawali and the government had done their own analysis of what was wrong, assisted by Oliver Wyman consultants. After he joined, Con Korfiatis himself identified the root causes for the consistent losses: a flawed commercial strategy and no benchmarking.

"There was a focus on being a copycat and playing the game that our nearby much, much larger airlines were playing. That was something we obviously would never be able to compete in and trying to take them on. They are huge transit airlines and have a global footprint. Unless you had billions of capital that you were happy to invest in, which Oman did not have, trying to emulate them did not make commercial sense," Korfiatis told *Aviation News*.

الطيران العماني
OMAN AIR
Oman Air
Meets
Amsterdam

▲ Oman Air CEO, Con Korfiatis in Amsterdam. The airline will commence four flights a week from Amsterdam, its 11th European destination on July 1 Richard Schuurman

He found an airline that had no clue about its cost base: "If it costs you an x-amount of money to turn around an aircraft at Muscat International Airport but the industry benchmark is half of that price, why is it so expensive in Muscat? That's what we are addressing. Everything must stand up to being benchmarked to best-industry practice. That wasn't being done in the past."

Differentiator

The solution is a complete overhaul of Oman Air's modus operandi and priorities. Copy-cat has gone, instead the focus is on Oman. "We focus on what we think will be a differentiator. That revolves around exploiting point-to-point traffic to Oman because that's our unique selling point. We have all the assets of Oman to promote. Most of our traffic used to be transit traffic: it has now swung the other way around."

As part of the country's "Vision 2040", Oman Air and Visit Oman have embarked on a long-term campaign to attract more tourism. It teases people to explore the country for longer spells or just during a short visit. Oman has a lot to offer, says Korfiatis: "You could

▼ Pictured in March about to touch down in Glasgow is one of the latest Boeing 737 MAX 8 for Oman Air. The aircraft, A4O-MN (cn 63368), made a fuel stop during its delivery flight from Seattle Boeing Field to Muscat SH

الطيران العماني
OMAN AIR
A4O-MN
MN

be on the beach off Muscat, hop on a boat and within an hour you are at the reef or on an island and sit in the sun for the day or do scuba diving or snorkeling. The next day you hop in a car and drive two hours into the mountains and are at 3,000m elevation. We are 40 minutes away from Dubai."

With that strategy change comes the rightsizing of the network. "We took a clean-sheet approach last year. The good news was that we were pretty much in the right European markets, so that's why we remain there and continue to invest in there by increasing frequencies to the existing destinations."

Oman Air operates to 41 destinations. That becomes 42 in July with the addition of Amsterdam. The airline has secured four weekly services at the slot-constrained airport until September only but hopes to fly there this winter and next summer too. Korfiatis said: "Amsterdam has a great reputation as one of the most connected airports in the world. In terms of our wish list for the next place we wanted to open in Europe, it was Amsterdam. This is the one we think had the most potential. I personally find it amazing that Oman Air in its 30+ years history never flew to Amsterdam."

There are another ten European destinations in the network, including Frankfurt, Rome, Milan, Zurich, Paris, and London Heathrow. "Heathrow will go to 11 flights a week from October 26 and to 14 a week next summer. There is an opportunity for more in the UK. Our short-term focus over the next 12-18 months is to get us back to double-daily at Heathrow, we have the slots. We will have a look at what comes after that. Manchester is a possibility; possibly a secondary London airport," Korfiatis says.

Oman Air also operates to eight destinations in the Gulf region, 14 on the Indian peninsula, a couple in Africa and five in the Far East. Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok and Jakarta attract much traffic from Australians. "This was a bit of a surprising one and not one we were directly chasing. The long-haul kangaroo route (Australia-Singapore-Europe) has very high load factors and hard-to-get seats, particularly through the summer outbound peak for Australia. We find quite a bit of traffic that uses our partner Qantas over our points in the Far East and do a two-stop through Muscat into Europe. Somehow, it organically invented itself."

▲ **One of Oman Air's A330-300s on Taxi** Airbus

Oneworld

After three years of preparations, Oman Air joins oneworld alliance in July. Korfiatis has high expectations. "We have lots of bilateral relationships already. We fly with a lot of airlines and the likes of Turkish, KLM, Lufthansa, Saudia. Some of them sit in other global alliances. The oneworld platform enables us to tap some of the global giants and expand our footprint with them. We are a mid-size airline and will always be a mid-size airline, so we will never have a global footprint with our own metal. So, it makes sense to do this through relationships."

When Avnews asked Why oneworld? Korfiatis responded: "I wouldn't say one is better than the other necessarily, it's a matter of where you sit in the world, whether it is a white spot for the alliance. Frankly, although it is a multilateral alliance, you still must see how the other partners feel about you. For us, in the wash-up of all of that, it came out as a oneworld decision."

▼ **One of Oman Air's 787-9 Dreamliner awaits is passengers at the gate.** Oman Air

Frankfurt Airport
الطيران العماني
OMAN AIR
A40-SH
DREAMLINER

▲ Oman Air 787-9 Dreamliner, A40-SH rotates out of Frankfurt International Airport. Bjoern Schmitt

Just like operating in Amsterdam could open the KLM network, so could Oman Air grow at Heathrow thanks to oneworld and British Airways? "I would like to think that some things might be helpful, but frankly, we aren't banking on it. We made the decision with no assumptions in that space but if anything does flow out of that, it's the icing on the cake. It could offer some opportunities, as our double dailies are coming back. We now have connectivity with flights across the Atlantic through the oneworld relationship with BA and American."

One direction

Oman Air is slowly steering in the right direction. In 2024, it reduced its losses before tax (EBIT) to OMR -72m compared to OMR -185.6m in 2023. 2025 will produce another loss. "We expect to be EBIT break-even by the end of 2026 and become profitable after that. Clearly, an EBIT break-even won't fully get you there. From a cash-flow point of view, we are very close to that, but we still must cover interest and tax, and we have a lot of debt on our balance sheet, some OMR 1.2bn. It's still significant and at some point, we will need assistance on how that is restructured because even with a world-class margin, it will take a long time to naturally pay off that debt."

The transformation includes a reduction of the workforce from 4,200 employees last year to ultimately some 3,000 by the end of this year as productivity increases. Korfiatis acknowledges this comes with opposition: "You have people who fully get it and are supportive, you have some who say they don't understand what was wrong before because we have been doing it this way for 30 years and no one had a problem. 'Why do you think you are better than anybody else?' That's life, that's people. But frankly, no one will be part of the future of the organisation if they can't move on that attitude."

The A330 fleet, which at one time included 13 aircraft, has been sold and will progressively leave the company before the end of the year. The last aircraft operated for Oman Air in April 2024 and are wet leased to Qatar Airways. Oman Air now operates an all-Boeing fleet of 15 MAX 8s, five 737-800s, four 737-900ERs leased from Sun Country Airlines, and seven 787-9s. Its two 787-8s will have left by late June.

"We have two more 787-9s delivering this year, with six more coming in from 2027. This is an opportunity to look at the configuration of the cabin.

A40-ME
A40-MA

▼ A line up of Oman Air tails at Muscat Airport Oman Air

Although we have a world-class product, it was selected many years ago, with a seat no longer in production. So, we have been looking at what the future 787 looks like in Business and Economy, that was one reason we were at Aircraft Interiors Expo in Hamburg in April."

All Dreamliners have a two-class cabin with 30/258 seats except two, which used to come with eight First, 24 Business, and 232 Economy seats. These two have recently been reconfigured into a Business Studio product. "We are not a business airline; we didn't have a big First-Class market. In 2023, our seat factor in First was 8%; they were flying around empty. So, we thought: what can we do with the product? We found we have some corporate markets out of Oman itself, and we don't have a problem filling Business Class. So, we have taken the opportunity to use these seats in a different way. Out seat factor is now approaching 70% as opposed to 8%."

Oman Air expects two more Boeing MAX 8s this year and one next year, which is the final aircraft from the original order placed in 2015. Although ordered directly with Boeing, all aircraft are on sale and leasebacks with lessors. Meanwhile, Korfiatis and his team are looking at ways to add more MAXs to the fleet and upgrade the Business product with lie-flat seats.

"Our order book completes next year, but that's not the end of the story. We will continue to need more 737s for growth, so we are looking at what those options might be. What we don't want is losing capacity in the meantime, so we are assessing in particular for the narrowbodies as we have pent-up demand for putting more capacity in. We would like to do it from mid to late next year." For this reason and to make up for any delays at Boeing, some NGs might stay on a bit longer.

There could be a twist to the fleet strategy. Con Korfiatis confirms that his airline is looking at the Airbus A321XLR. "Looking at the network opportunities for us for the next ten years with city pairs that would make sense, some of those are a bit beyond the range of the MAX 8 but not thick enough for widebodies. So, a long-range narrowbody would look like a good solution to open those sorts of markets. On the range-capability of the longest-range Airbus product versus the longest-range Boeing product, there is a discrepancy. It leaves a bit of a hole."

"Potentially, if it is an Airbus solution, do you have a sub-fleet? Is there an opportunity to look at a full-fleet transition from one product to another at some point? All those things are being examined now. If we thought we would be running a campaign of a longer-term fleet type, that would probably need to happen within a 12 to 18-month period. This is really for delivering things in the early 2030s." AN

▲ Oman Air's business suite available on its 787 Dreamliner fleet Oman Air

الطيران العماني
OMAN AIR

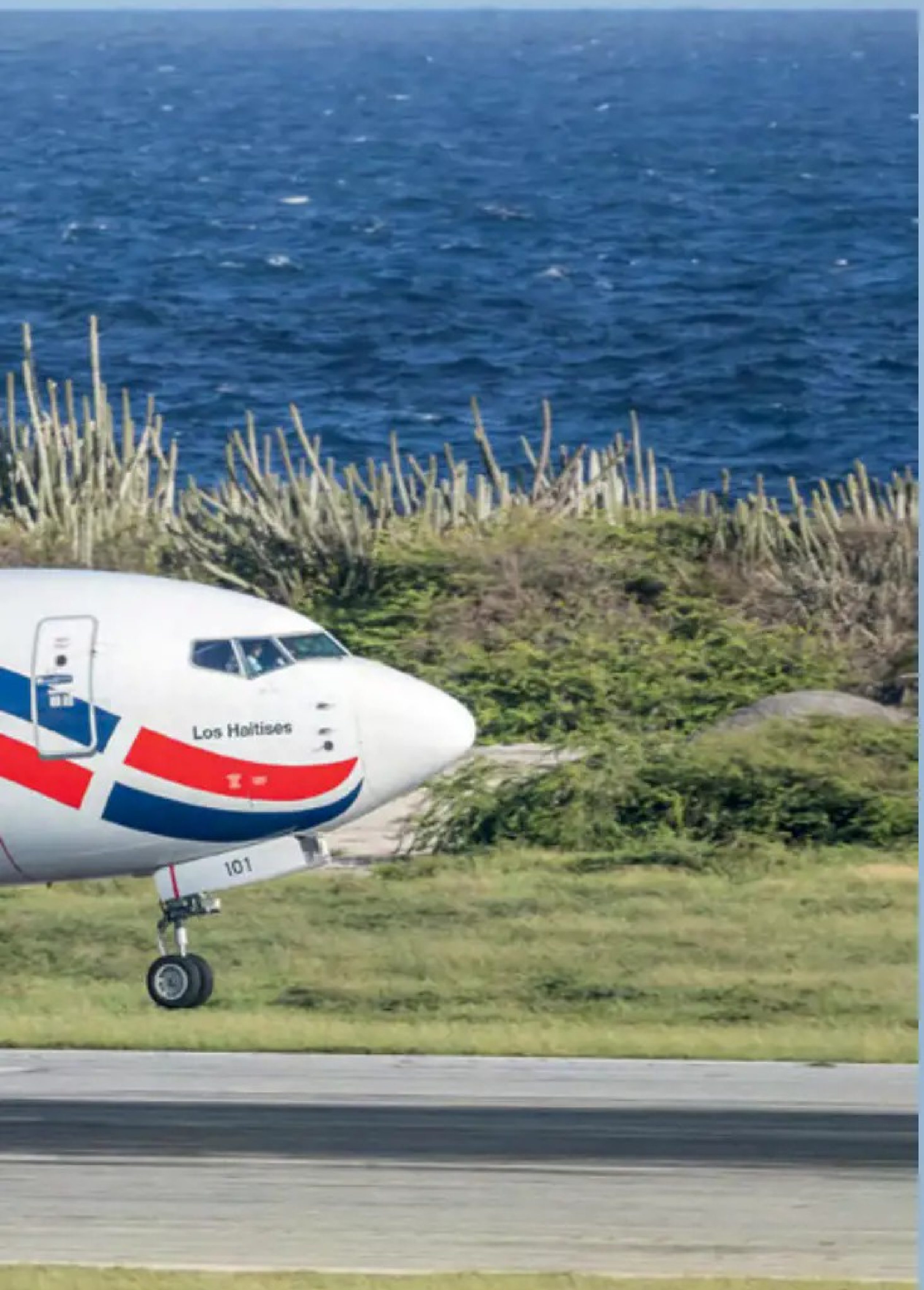
▼ Oman Air placed an order of Boeing 737-Max 8s in 2015. At the time of writing the airline operates a fleet of 15 Max 8s Oman Air

CARIBBEAN GATEWAY

Hato International Airport is located on the north coast of Curaçao, one of the six Dutch Caribbean islands. Located just 40 miles north of Venezuela, Curaçao has become the number one international summer destination for 2025, according to Google Flights' US data. Hato's single runway welcomes an ever-increasing number of flights from the USA, Canada, Colombia, the Netherlands, Panama, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela, and other Dutch Caribbean islands. Annual passengers to Curaçao surpassed two million for the first time in 2024.

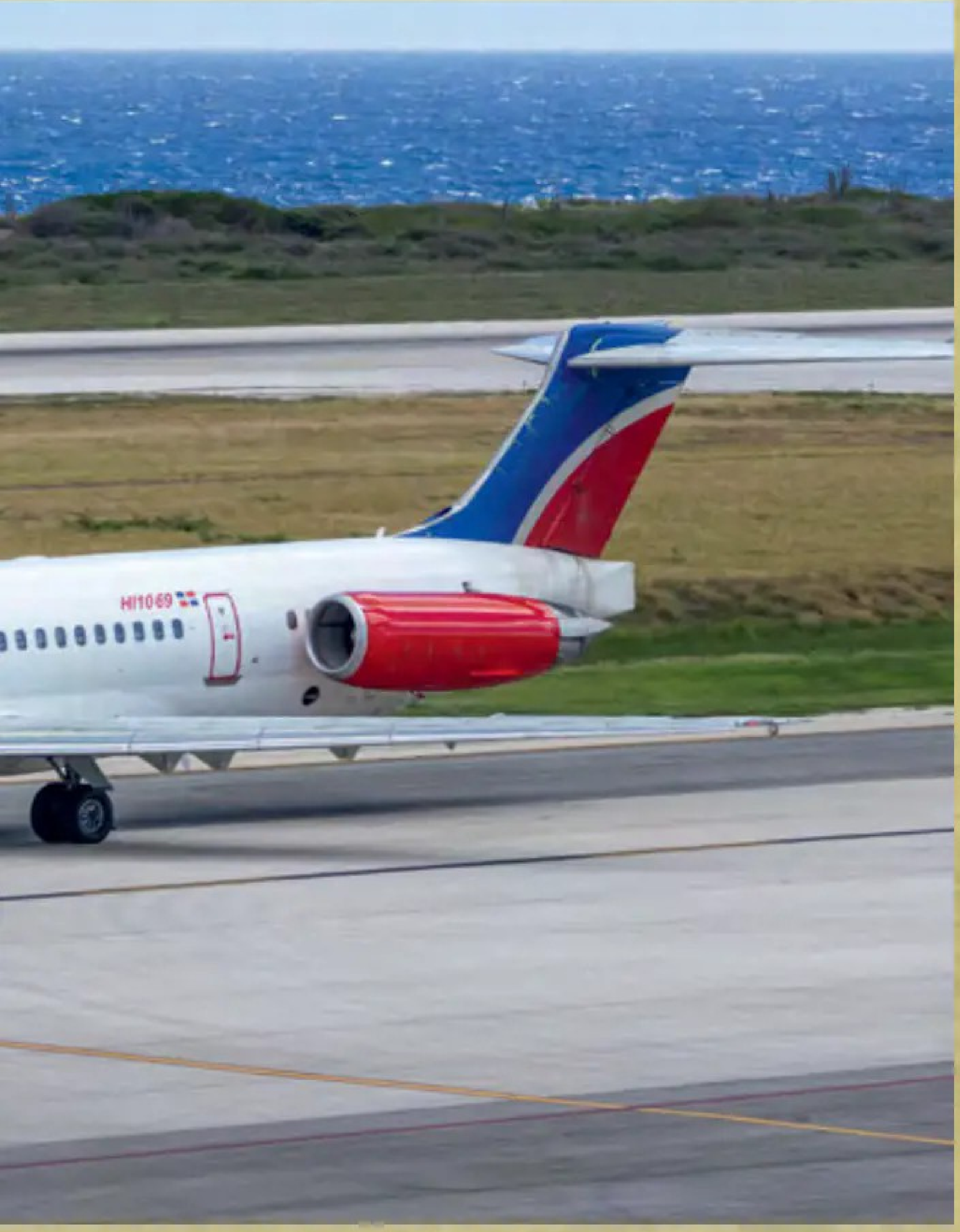
UniWorld
UW

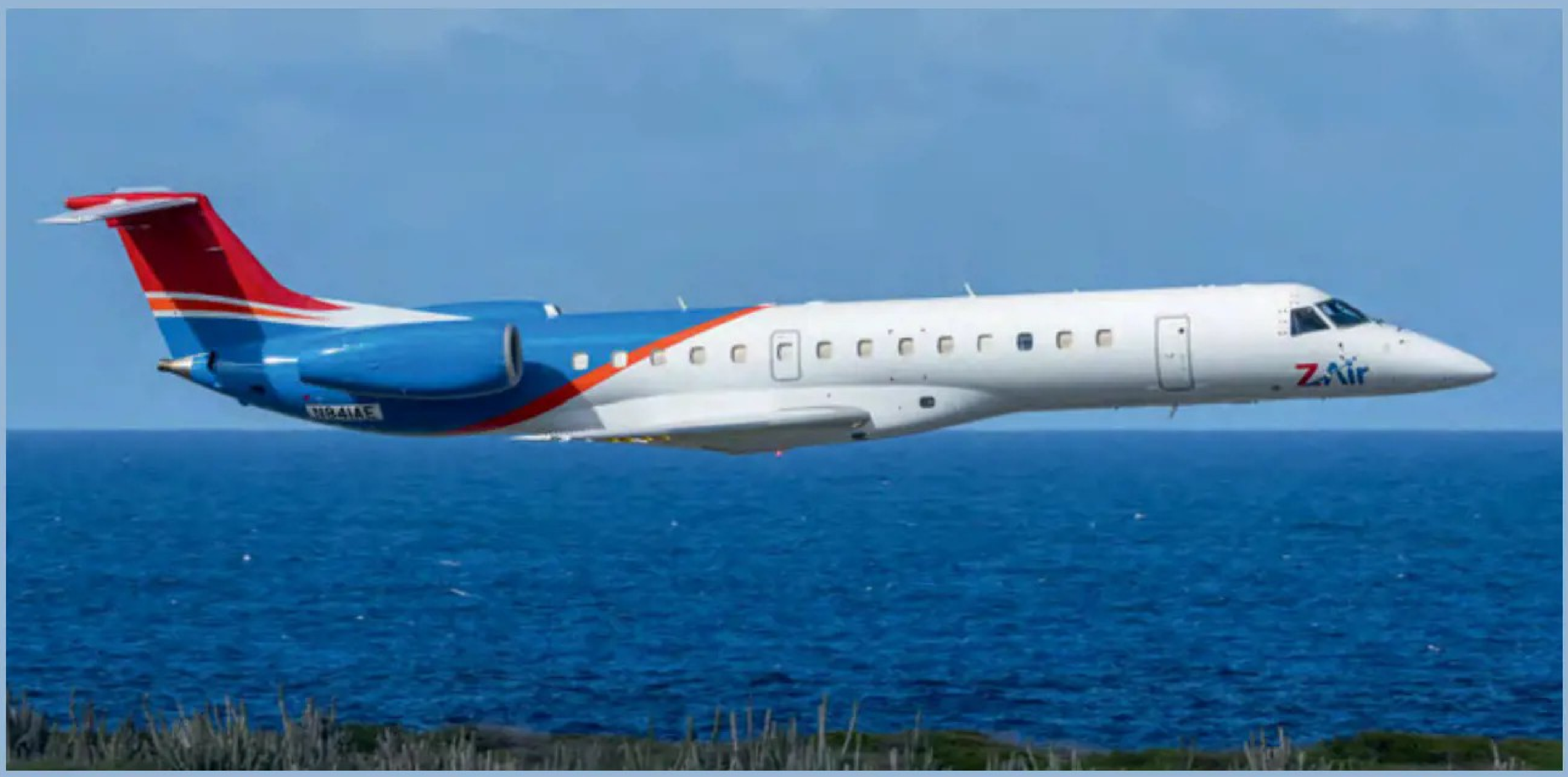
▲ 3HP-1939UCG, Uniworld Air Cargo' Boeing 727-225F, gliding to final for runway 11. The aircraft operates services between Panama, Willemstad and Caracas with the 727 and 737



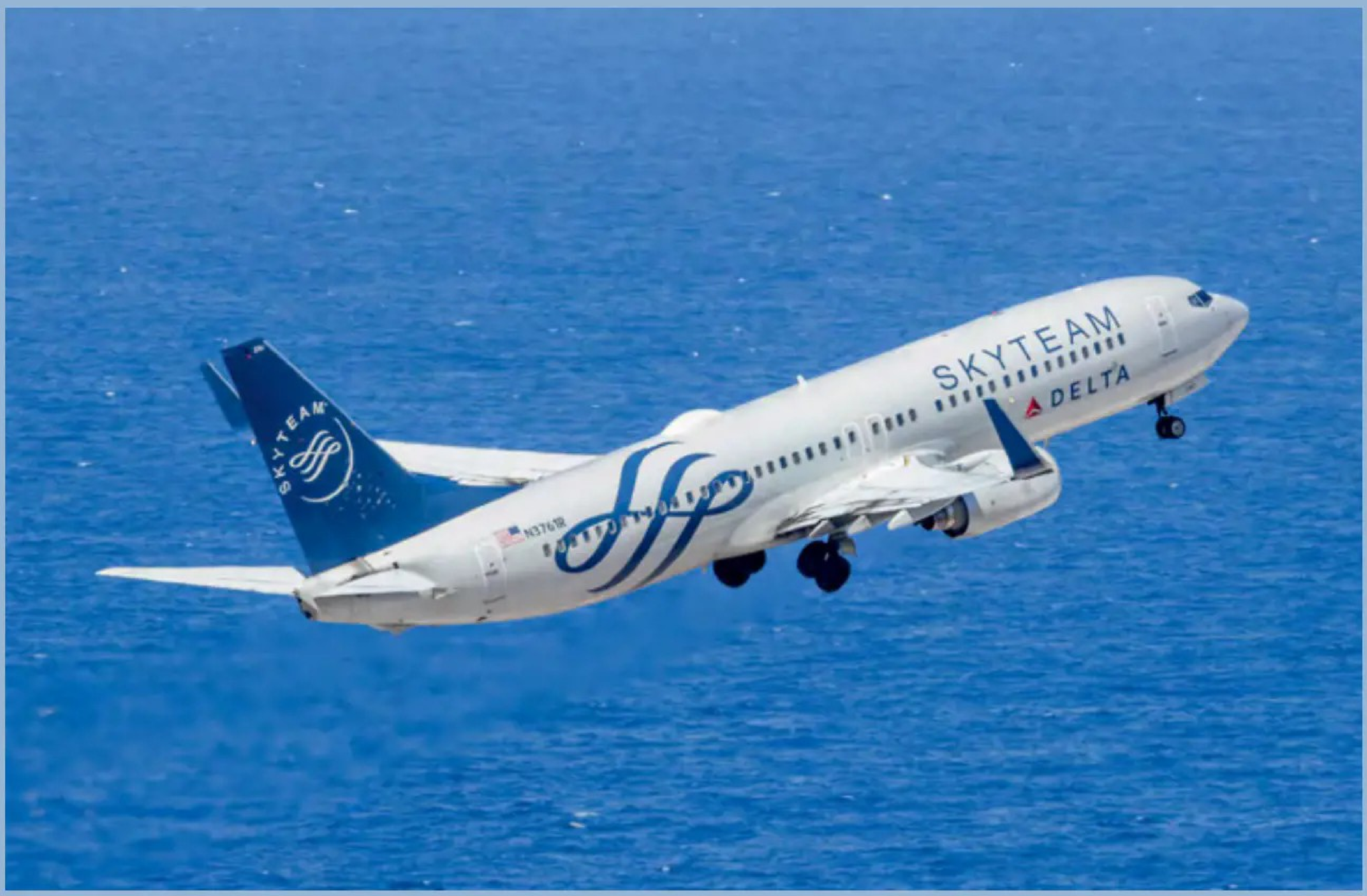
▲ HI-1101, Arajet Boeing 737-8 in the Dominican Republic flag special livery, touches down on runway 11, arriving from Santo Domingo
All images Patrick Lalande

Patrick lalande shares some images he took of the local traffic at Hato International Airport in the Caribbean recently

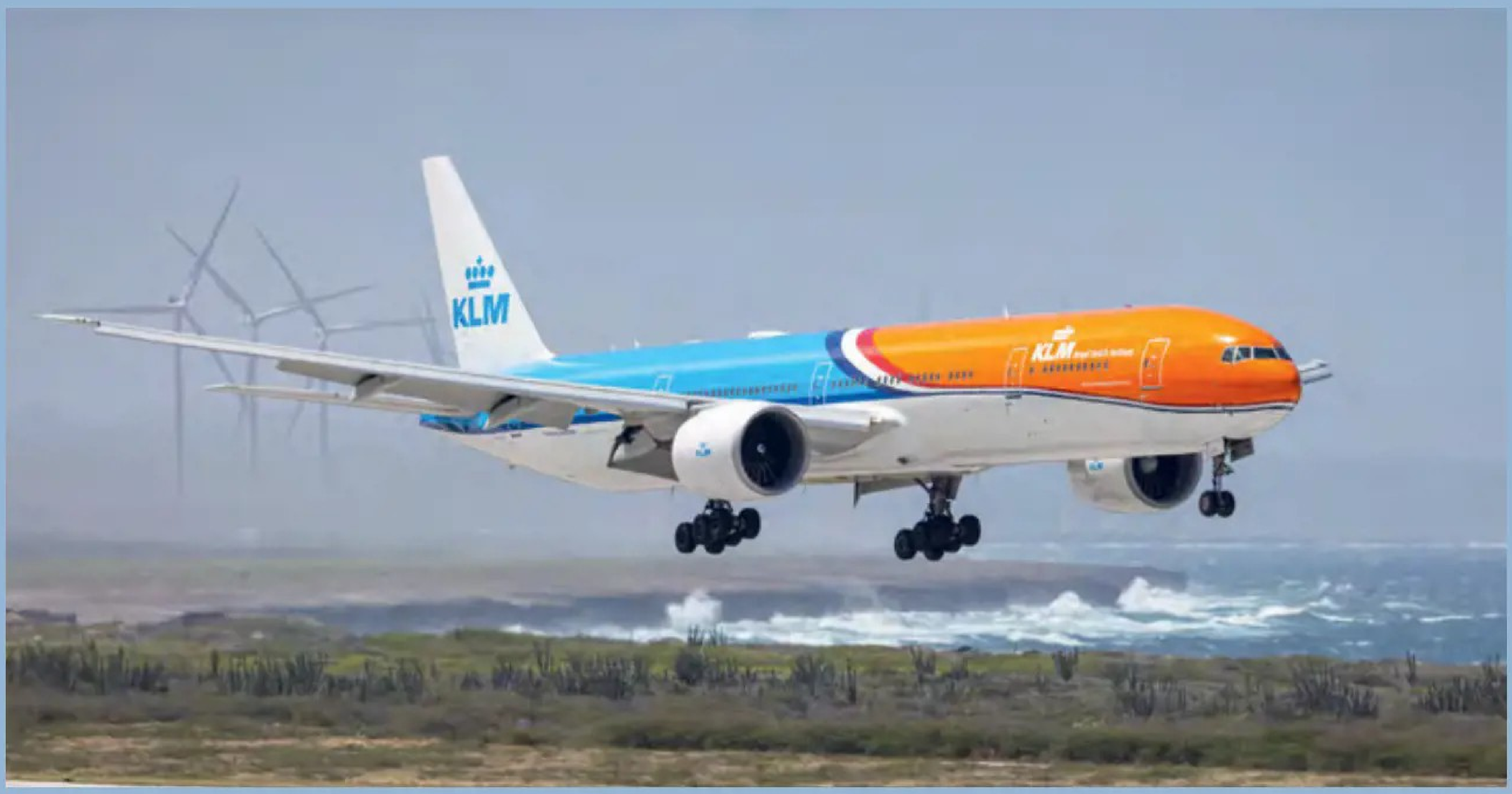




▲ N841AE, Z Air Embraer 145LR doing a fly-by at the end of its delivery flight. Now registered PJ-SMD, the Brazilian aircraft is the airline's first of two. It is expected that Z Air will operate the new jets to Sint-Maarten and Medellin soon



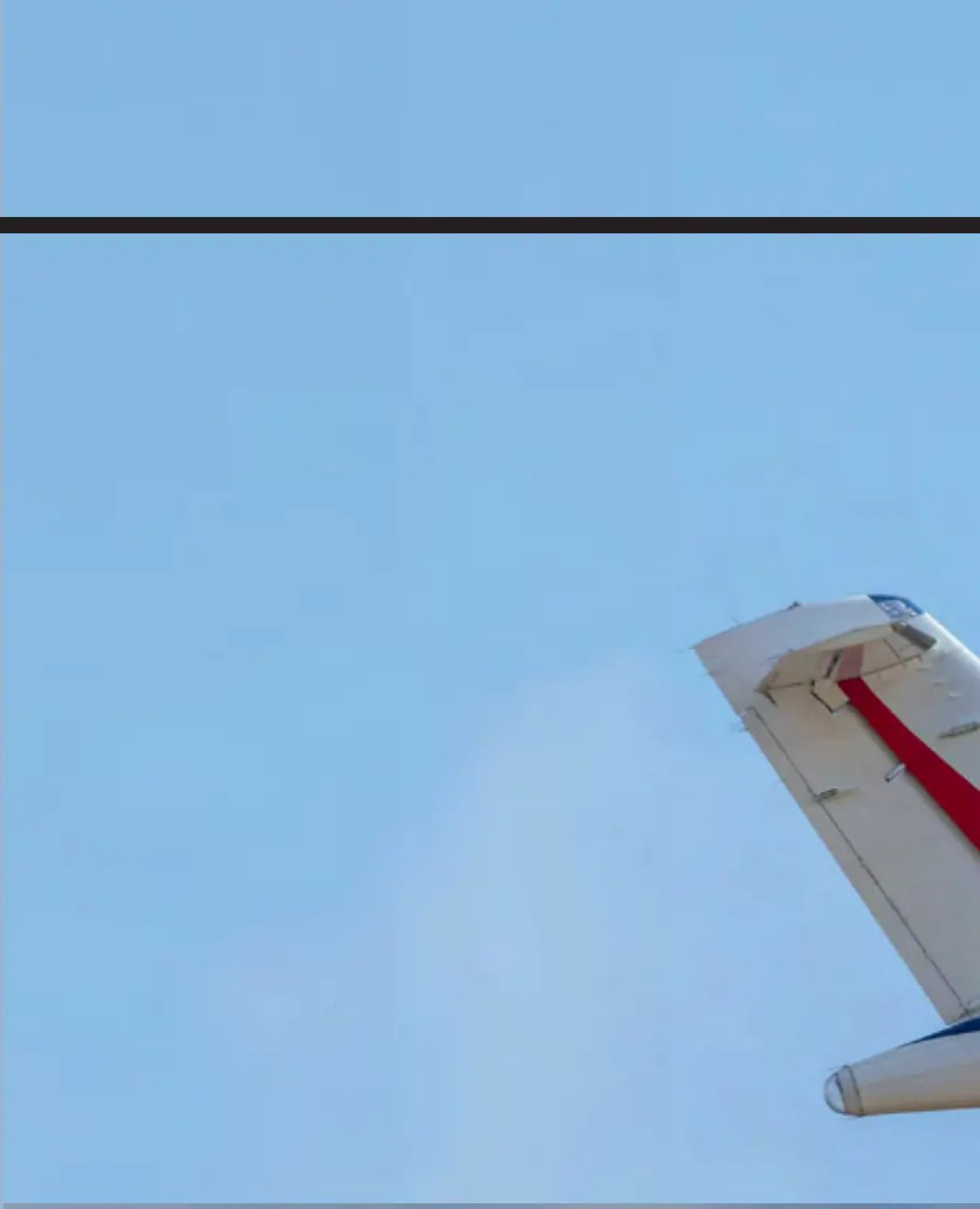
▲ N3761R, Delta Airlines Boeing 737-832 in Skyteam livery departs Curaçao for Atlanta. The airlines operate this route three times per week

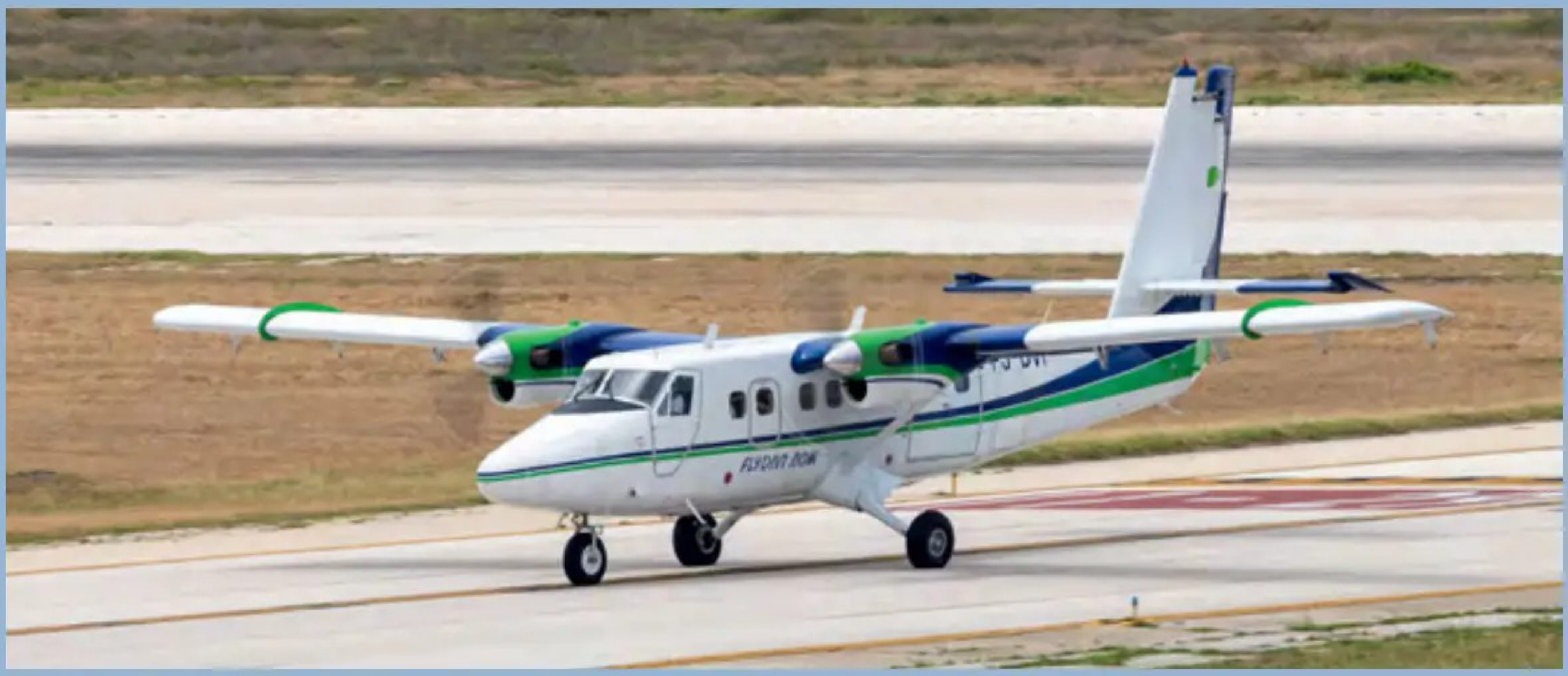


▲ PH-BVA, KLM's Boeing 777—300(ER) in 'Orange Pride' livery on short final. The famed Dutch carrier operates daily flights between Amsterdam and Curaçao

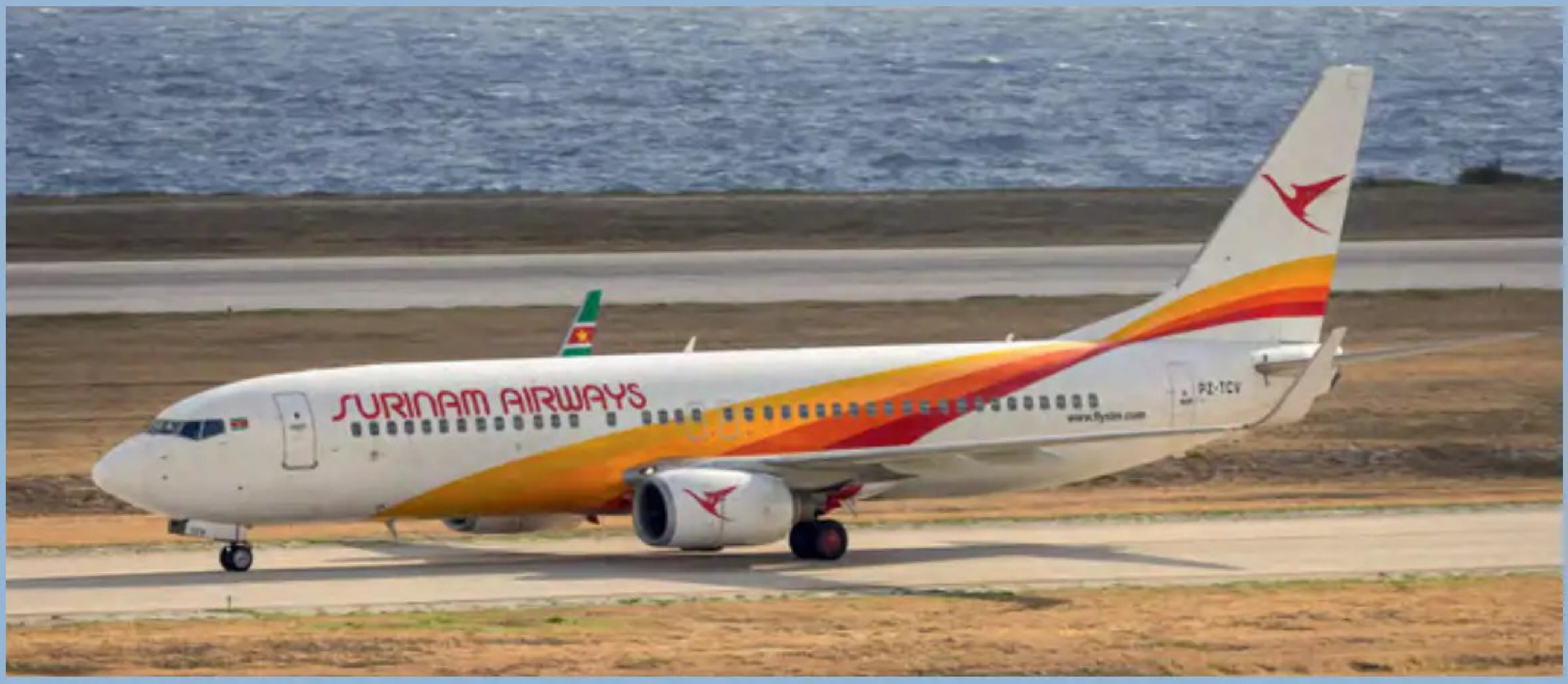
◀ HI1069 Red Air McDonnell Douglas MD-82 taxies for departure, returning home to Santo Domingo. The Dominican carrier is operating the route as part of an agreement with Venezuela's Laser airlines. Passengers originating out of Caracas on Laser transfer in Curaçao before proceeding on to Santo Domingo with Red Air

▶ PJ-WIV, Winair's (Windward Island Airways) ATR-42-600, departs for St-Maarten's famous Princess Juliana International Airport. The company currently operates the only direct flights between the two Dutch Caribbean islands following the demise of Curaçao-based JetAir Caribbean

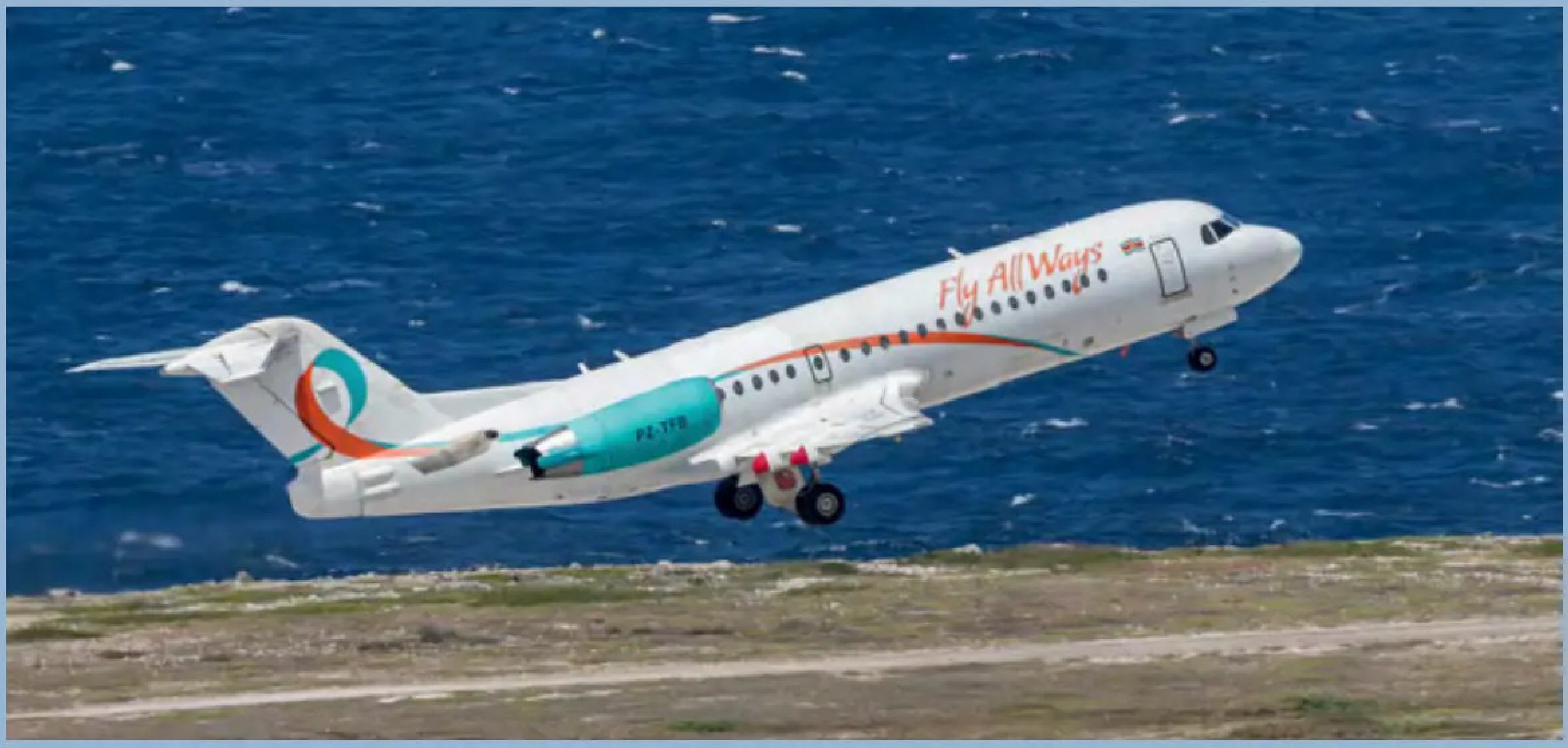




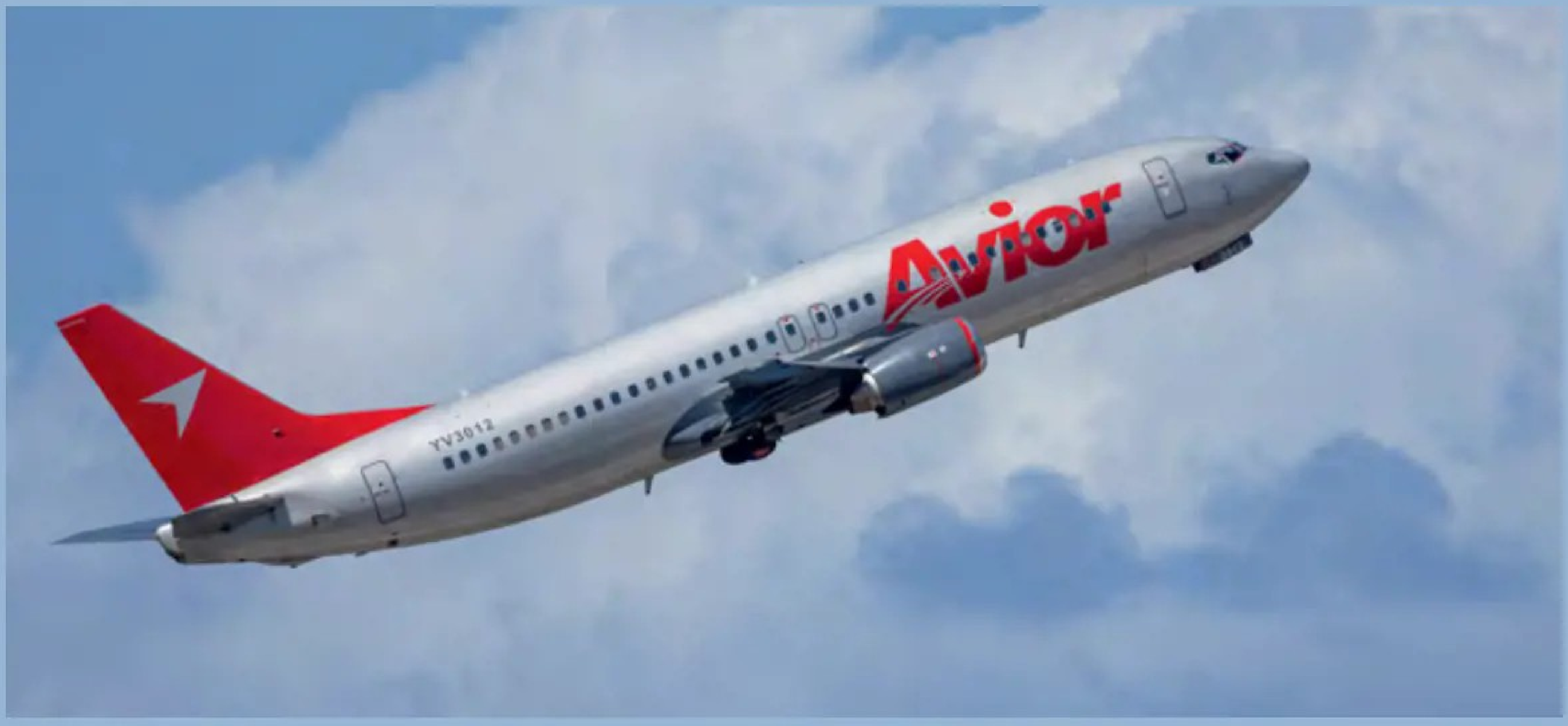
▲ PJ-DVF, a De Havilland Canada Twin Otter operated by local airline Divi Divi Air, taxies to the ramp after a flight from Oranjestad, Aruba. The airline operates multiple flights per day between Curaçao, Aruba and Bonaire



▲ PZ-TCV, Surinam Airways' Boeing 737-800 taxies in the early morning hours after arriving from Paramaribo



▲ PZ-TFB, Fly Allways' Fokker F70, departs for Paramaribo. The Surinamese airline operates an infrequent service between Havana and Paramaribo via a tech-stop in Curaçao



▲ YV3012, Avior Boeing 737-400 departs for Caracas

YV622?
turpialairlines.com

PJ-WIV
WINAIR

turpial airlines
Volamos en tu dirección

LASER Airlines
YV3465

▲ YV3465 Laser Airlines McDonnell Douglas MD-83 taxies for departure for the daily flight to Caracas

◀ YV-622T, Turpial Airlines' Boeing 737-400 departs for a flight to Paramaribo, on behalf of Fly Allways

AERCARIBE
CARGO

▲ 9H-HFL, a HiFly Malta Airbus A330-242 arrives in Curaçao. The flight was conducted on behalf of leisure airline TUI, replacing the normal Boeing 787

◀ HK-5357, AerCaribe Cargo's Boeing 737-4K5(SF). The Colombian Cargo company operates daily flights to Curaçao from Bogota

Stuart Haigh

The latest changes on the UK, Irish, Isle of Man and Guernsey registers

Restorations

REG'N	MODE(S)	TYPE	C/N	OWNER
G-AXTL	40185B	Piper PA-28-140 Cherokee B	28-26247	Ocean Heights Aviation Training Centre Ltd, (Kitala, Entebbe, Uganda)
G-BMSI	408293	Cameron N-105	1282	ACH Harvey (Wincanton, Somerset)
G-BSRP	403244	Rotorway Executive (built by JP Dennison)	3824	JP Chandler, (Bristol, City of Bristol)
G-BTLY	408281	Britten-Norman BN-2B-26 Islander (built by Pilatus Britten-Norman Ltd)	2253	D Brem-Wilson, Biggin Hill, Greater London
G-BVND	4082A2	Britten-Norman BN-2B-20 Islander (built by Pilatus Britten-Norman Ltd)	2290	Caledonian Aircraft Spares Ltd, (Thornhill, Stirlingshire)
G-CDNT	404E20	Zenair CH.601XL Zodiac	PFA 162B-14360	W McCormack, (Harburn, West Lothian)
G-CDRC	40115C	Cessna 182Q Skylane	182-67085	Warwickshire Aviation Ltd, Wellesbourne Mountford, Warwickshire
G-CEYI	405630	Cessna 152	152-83208	EJ Partridge, Spilstead Farm, Sedlescombe, East Sussex
G-EZWK	40690C	Airbus A320-214	5688	Easyjet Airline Company Ltd, London Luton, Bedfordshire (NB)
G-OEZY	403AF5	Europa Aviation Europa (built by AW Wakefield)	PFA 247-12590	DB Lennie, (Bangor, Co. Down)
G-SALA	400B4F	Piper PA-32-300 Cherokee Six	32-7940106	Sala Aviation Ltd, Jersey, Channel Islands
G-TAWC	40665E	Boeing 737-8K5	39922	TUI Airways Ltd trading as TUI, London Luton, Bedfordshire (NB)
G-TAWD	406696	Boeing 737-8K5	37265	TUI Airways Ltd trading as TUI, London Luton, Bedfordshire (NB)
G-TAWK	4067EE	Boeing 737-8K5	37239	TUI Airways Ltd trading as TUI, London Luton, Bedfordshire (NB)
G-TUKX	408040	Boeing 737-8K5	35142	TUI Airways Ltd trading as TUI, London Luton, Bedfordshire (NB)
2-BPDG	TBA	Boeing 737-8AS(BCF)	33553	UMB Bank NA, (stored at Denpasar, Indonesia)

New Registrations

REG'N	MODE(S)	TYPE	C/N	OWNER
G-CMXD	40816C	Airbus Helicopters Deutschland MBB-BK 117 D-3	21367	Airbus Helicopters UK Ltd, Oxford, Oxfordshire (for Royal Air Force as a Jupiter HC2)
G-CMXY	408285	Bell 206B JetRanger III	1611	EliExpress SRLS (Costigliole d'Asti At, Italy)
G-CMYH	408208	AeroPro EuroFOX 3K (assembled by Ascent Industries Ltd)	72425	Highland Gliding Club Ltd, Easterton, Moray
G-CMYX	40825B	Cameron Sport-80	12760	J Vonka, (Wargrave, Berkshire)
G-CMYZ	4082A3	AutoGyro Calidus	C00583	Rotorsport Sales and Service Ltd, (Poplar Farm, Prolly Moor, Wentnor, Shropshire)
G-CMZD	408295	Aeroprakt A32 Vixxen (assembled by Dragon Aviation Sport Aircraft Ltd)	A323336	Dragon Aviation Sport Aircraft Ltd, Ley Farm, Chirk, Wrexham
G-CMZV	4082A6	Aeroprakt A32 Vixxen (assembled by Dragon Aviation Sport Aircraft Ltd)	A32362	R Everitt, Ley Farm, Chirk, Wrexham
G-CNAA	40828C	Flylight Nine	DA301	Flylight Airsports Ltd, Sywell, Northamptonshire
G-CNAC	4082AA	Van's RV-9A	LAA 320-15652	KC Evans, (Honley, West Yorkshire)
G-CNAD	40829C	Wade BM-34	DW03	DM Wade, (Shevington, Greater Manchester)
G-CNAJ	408290	Halley Exodus Deltajet 500 Stingray (assembled by Flylight Airsports Ltd)	EA 025	AL Johnson, (Barton, Cambridgeshire)
G-CNAS	408200	Halley Exodus Deltajet 500 Stingray (assembled by Flylight Airsports Ltd)	EA 029	AP Seal, (London NW3)
G-CNBB	4082B3	Cameron TR-70	12575	Cameron Balloons Ltd, (Bristol, City of Bristol)
G-CNBZ	40827F	Diamond S-120	DB-SN-037	AM Holly, (Breadstone, Gloucestershire)
G-CPIO	403EED	Avions Mudry CAP-10B	134	RM Midgley, (Ribchester, Lancashire)
G-CRUX	40825D	Boeing 737-8	44863	Ascend Airways Ltd, London Stansted, Essex (NB)
G-CSLS	408294	SOCATA TB10 Tobago	2188	Cavendish Aviation UK Ltd, Earls Colne, Essex
G-CSLY	408277	SOCATA TB20 Trinidad	1711	Cavendish Aviation UK Ltd, Earls Colne, Essex
G-CWAW	408261	Skyleader JA-400 Skyleader 400 (built by Air Operation Technologies a.s.)	4 360 401 E	AJ & CR Williams, (Tonypandy, Glamorgan)
G-DBSN	408105	Diamond P-60	DB-SN-026	CG Dobson, (Goring, Oxfordshire)
G-DNGO	4082AE	Ivanov Dingo	0004	RH Hughes (Denmead, Hampshire)
G-EJMX	4082A3	Bell 505 JetRanger X (built by Bell Textron Canada Ltd)	65609	EJ Mackelden and Sons (Bobbing) Ltd, (Combe, Somerset)
G-FABX	40829D	UltraMagic N-210	210/186	Fly Away Ballooning Ltd, (Taunton, Somerset)
G-GSTN	40826B	Airbus Helicopters EC130 T2	9692	VLL Ltd, trading as GB Helicopters, Oakfield Manor, Lower Peover, Cheshire
G-HITF	40824A	Airbus Helicopters AS350B3 Ecureuil	9687	Airbus Helicopters UK Ltd, Oxford, Oxfordshire
G-HUML	40829F	Hummel Ultracruiser (built by EJ Warnell)	UK/UC/001	Albion Aero Services Ltd, (Stanwell, Surrey)
G-IRRB	40823B	SOCATA TB10 Tobago	2087	R Bone, Earls Colne, Essex
G-JIIO	4081DF	Schempp-Hirth Arcus M	302	SG Jones, Membury, Berkshire
G-KCUB	4025DD	Piper J3F-50 Cub	4062	SJ Hornsby, Eshott, Northumberland
G-LESO	40826A	Boeing 737-8	64606	Ascend Airways Ltd, London Stansted, Essex (NB)
G-MAVS	40828D	Flylight Skyranger Nynja	405-28	Wanafly Airsports Ltd, Deenethorpe, Northamptonshire

G-ODAL	406FDF	Piper PA-24-250 Comanche	24-3364	M Bonsall, Netherthorpe, South Yorkshire
G-OJJP	40814D	Learjet 45	45-163	Saxonair Charter Ltd, Norwich International, Norfolk (NB)
G-OSJT	40468A	Piper PA-32R-301 Saratoga II SP	3246193	S-J Thirsk, Leeds East, North Yorkshire
G-OTBM	4081A2	Schempp-Hirth Arcus M	303	TBM Estates Ltd, Lasham, Hampshire
G-PCTF	4081BA	Pilatus PC-24	570	Oriens Flight Operations Ltd, Biggin Hill, Greater London (NB)
G-PDDY	40819C	Robinson R66 Turbine	1461	HQ Aviation Ltd, Denham, Buckinghamshire
G-POSY	40623C	Pitts S-2S Special (built by Aviat Aircraft Inc)	3018	Tailpin Holdings Ltd, (Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey)
G-PSCA	40682B	Eurocopter Deutschland EC135 T2+	1074	Babcock Mission Critical Services Onshore Ltd, Gloucestershire (NB) (for Scottish Charity Air Ambulance, Perth)
G-PWII	407D4A	Van's RV-8 (built by AMD Abreu, A Lopes & J Durao)	83330	PG Wilson, Audley End, Essex
G-RESE	4080C6	Leonardo AW139	32055	Bristow Helicopters Ltd, Aberdeen International, Aberdeenshire (NB)
G-SYLA	408284	Beech B200 King Air (built by Raytheon Aircraft Company)	BB-1840	ACH Scylla Ltd, Humberside, Lincolnshire
G-THNG	406301	Avtech Jabiru J430 (built by JV Sanders)	LAA 338-14959	CH Richardson, (Waltham Abbey, Essex)
G-TTSD	4061BD	Airbus A320-251N	12453	British Airways PLC, London Heathrow, Middlesex
G-TTSE	4061C0	Airbus A320-251N	12483	British Airways PLC, London Heathrow, Middlesex
G-UIDO	408267	Robinson R22 Beta II	4843	EBG (Helicopters) Ltd, Redhill, Surrey
G-UZEH	408184	Airbus A320-251N (built by Airbus Tianjin)	12551	Easyjet Airline Company Ltd, London Luton, Bedfordshire (NB)
G-WINY	408031	Diamond S-77	DB-SN-022	ARA Moore, (Bideford, Devon)
G-WKTP	40826C	Beech B300 King Air 350 (built by Raytheon Aircraft Company)	FL-203	DEA Aviation Ltd, Retford Gamston, Nottinghamshire
G-XDCB	4080E8	Bell 505 JetRanger X (built by Bell Textron Canada Ltd)	65507	DCB Aviation Limited Partnership Inc, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire
G-XXEF	4081FB	Leonardo AW139	32083	J Chalmers, Keeper of The Privy Purse, RAF Odiham, Hampshire (operated by The King's Helicopter Flight)
G-YSSS	40829A	Pilatus PC-24	333	TAG Aviation (UK) Ltd, Farnborough, Hampshire
EI-AFX	TBA	Reims Cessna F172L	0839	Advanced Field Solutions Ltd, Dublin-Weston, Co. Kildare
EI-HNU	TBA	Airbus A320-214	6500	Macquarie Aerospace Ireland Ltd, (stored Prague-Ruzyne, Czech Republic)
EI-HNX	TBA	I.C.P. Savannah S	21-07-54-0798	Private Individual, Co. Westmeath
EI-HOU	TBA	I.C.P. Savannah S	23-02-54-938	Funfly Aerosports Flying Club Company Limited by Guarantee, Clonbullogue, Co. Offaly
EI-HOX	TBA	Tomark Viper SD-4 RTC	41294	Newcastle Logistics Ltd, Newcastle, Co. Wicklow
EI-HPG	TBA	Vulcanair P68C	511/C	Atlantic Flight Training Ltd, Cork, Co. Cork
EI-HPL	TBA	Comco Ikarus C42B	1602-7439	Tibohine Flying Club Ltd, Tibohine, Co. Roscommon
EI-HSE	4CAF14	Bombardier CRJ-900	15088	Cityjet DAC, Operated for SAS, Copenhagen-Kastrup, Denmark)
EI-IKX	4CAE9E	Boeing 737-8200	62389	Ryanair DAC, Dublin, Co. Fingal, (NB)
EI-IKY	4CAE9F	Boeing 737-8200	62387	Ryanair DAC, Dublin, Co. Fingal, (NB)
EI-IKZ	4CAEA0	Boeing 737-8200	62386	Ryanair DAC, Dublin, Co. Fingal, (NB)
EI-KFG	4CAECD	Airbus A320-232	6614	Wilmington Trust SP Services (Dublin) Ltd, (operated by FlyArystan, Almaty, Kazakhstan)
EI-LDH	4CAE28	Airbus A300F4-605R	871	ASL Airlines (Ireland) Ltd, Dublin, Co. Fingal (NB)
EI-LIL	TBA	CASA 1-131E Jungmann	2128	Private Individual, (Dublin, Co. Dublin)
EI-SCF	4CAD96	Airbus A320-251N	12528	Scandinavian Airlines Ireland Ltd, Copenhagen-Kastrup, Denmark
M-ABTE	424C98	Bombardier Challenger 3500	21056	Aviation Finance & Leasing Ltd, London Stansted, Essex (operated by Ryanair)
M-ABTO	424C96	AgustaWestland AW109SP Grand New	22347	Sloane Helicopters Ltd, Sywell, Northamptonshire
M-ABTR	424C9C	Boeing 737-7Q8	30674	Wellington Leasing Leasing No.45 Ltd, (stored Castellon-Costa Azahar, Spain)
M-BCOL	424C9A	ATR-72-212A	1047	Blue Turbo Two Finance LCC, (stored Ben Slimane, Morocco)
M-DMVR	424C89	Leonardo AW169	69181	Vmadeleine Ltd, (Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands)
M-HUGO	424C99	ATR-72-212A	1057	Blue Turbo Two Finance LCC, (stored Ben Slimane, Morocco)
2-AARC	TBA	Airbus A319-112	1618	AAR International Inc (stored St Athan, Vale of Glamorgan)
2-ALFR	TBA	Airbus A330-343	720	Alfor Aviation & Technical Services Ltd, (stored Beja, Portugal)
2-GALA	43F79A	Piper PA-31P-350 Mojave	31P-8414049	Gala NG SA, Sion, Switzerland
2-GNKA	TBA	Eurocopter EC225LP Super Puma 2+	2779	Airbus Helicopters SAS, TBA
2-MMWD	43F7C2	Cessna A185E Skywagon	185-01996	Claymore AS Ltd, L'Aquila, Italy
2-ONEL	43F7C0	Learjet 75	45-535	One Private Charter Services Ltd, Jersey, Channel Islands
2-SILK	TBA	Dassault Falcon 2000S	744	Pacific Azur Co Ltd, TBA
2-TECY	TBA	Airbus A320-233	5050	Royal Air Charter Service Inc, (stored at Haiku Meilan International, People's Republic of China)
2-VNYL	TBA	Bombardier CRJ-200ER	7546	Mymarian Ltd, (stored Riga, Latvia)
2-WKTP	TBA	Beech B300 King Air 350	FL-203	DEA Aviation Ltd, Retford Gamston, Nottinghamshire

Previous Identities

Reg'n	Previous Identity	Reg'n	Previous Identity
G-BTLY	ex D-IEST	**G-UZEH**	ex B-005C
G-BVND	ex 9M-BTP	**G-WKTP**	ex N403HS
G-CMXY	ex C-GFEC	**G-XDCB**	ex G-CMSY
G-CMYZ	ex D-MTGZ	**G-XXEF**	ex I-EASM
G-CPIO	ex G-BXRC	**G-YSSS**	ex D-CSCR
G-CRUX	ex 9H-ORN	**EI-AFX**	ex G-OFCM
G-CSLS	ex PH-MLS	**EI-HNU**	ex 9K-AKI
G-CSLY	ex PH-MLY	**EI-HPG**	ex OY-VNS
G-EJMX	ex C-GBQM	**EI-HPL**	ex D-MHMZ
G-EZWK	ex OE-IVJ	**EI-HSE**	ex OE-LOM
G-GSTN	ex HB-XAB	**EI-IKY**	ex N4022L
G-IRRB	ex PH-MLO	**EI-IKZ**	ex N4022T
G-KCUB	ex G-AGAT	**EI-KFG**	ex HA-LYQ
G-LESO	ex 9H-HYA	**EI-LDH**	ex B-LDH
G-ODAL	ex N61970	**EI-LIL**	ex F-AZZF
G-OJJP	ex G-OPUL	**EI-SCF**	ex F-WWTO
G-OSJT	ex G-OSJC	**M-ABTE**	ex C-GICL
G-PCTF	ex HB-VZD	**M-ABTO**	ex GZ100 (RAF)
G-POSY	ex G-OSZS	**M-ABTR**	ex C9-BAR
G-PSCA	ex G-WASC	**M-BCOL**	ex 5N-GAE
G-PWII	ex G-CMEJ	**M-DMVR**	ex I-RAIQ
G-RESE	ex I-PTFR	**M-HUGO**	ex 5N-GAA
G-SALA	ex 2-SALA	**2-AARC**	ex ER-00002
G-SYLA	ex N468DB	**2-ALFR**	ex HS-XTG
G-TAWC	ex C-FAWC	**2-BPDG**	ex 9M-WCZ
G-TAWD	ex C-FYSD	**2-GALA**	ex N398RD
G-TAWK	ex C-FLWK	**2-GNKA**	ex YR-ZZI
G-THNG	ex G-CGOL	**2-MMWD**	ex G-OMUD
G-TTSD	ex F-WWBT	**2-ONEL**	ex G-USHA
G-TTSE	ex F-WWDZ	**2-SILK**	ex VP-CTV
G-TUKX	ex C-FYKX	**2-VNYL**	ex VQ-BIX
G-UIDO	ex OE-XPL	**2-WKTP**	ex G-WKTP

REGISTER REVIEW

Cancellations

REG'N	TYPE	C/N	Fate
G-AGAT	Piper J3F-50 Cub	4062	Re-registered as G-KCUB
G-AMZT	Auster J5F Aiglet Trainer	3107	To Czech Republic as OK-MZT
G-ASFA	Cessna 172D	172-50182	Cancelled by CAA (CofA expired 20.07.16. Noted stored at Elstree, Hertfordshire 03.25)
G-AXGV	Druine D62B Condor	RAE/641	Cancelled by CAA (crashed on landing at Croft Farm, Croft, Dalton-on-Tees, Teesside 30.03.25)
G-AXTL	Piper PA-28-140 Cherokee B	28-26247	Cancelled by CAA (but restored again later in the month)
G-AZVA	Bölkow Bö209 Monsun 150FF	177	To Germany
G-BLMI	Piper L-18C Super Cub	18-2066	To Belgium as OO-GUS
G-BLOR	Piper PA-30-160 Twin Comanche	30-59	To USA as N30FA
G-BOTK	Cameron O-105	1765	Cancelled by CAA (CofA expired 06.03.11)
G-BSUV	Cameron O-77	2407	To Canada as C-GHBL
G-BXRC	Avions Mudry CAP-10B	134	Re-registered as G-CPIO
G-CBJV	Rotorway Executive 162F	6589	Cancelled by CAA (Permit to Fly expired 22.09.23)
G-CCDC	Rans S6-ES Coyote II	PFA 204-13992	Cancelled by CAA (Permit to Fly expired 26.08.20, last reported at Rossall Field, Cockerham, Lancashire 03.22)
G-CCSR	Aerotechnik EV-97A Eurostar	PFA 313-14174	Cancelled by CAA (Permit to Fly expired 03.06.22, last reported at Otherton, Staffordshire 05.21)
G-CCYI	Cameron O-105	10604	To Morocco
G-CDNT	Zenair CH601XL Zodiac	PFA 162B-14360	Cancelled by CAA (but restored again later in the month)
G-CEVK	Schleicher Ka.6CR Rhönsegler	6541	Cancelled by CAA (CofA expired 05.07.15)
G-CGOL	Avtech Jabiru J430	LAA 336-14959	Re-registered as G-THNG
G-CHIZ	Flylight Dragonfly	080	Cancelled by CAA (SSDR microlight so no Permit to Fly required, was based in France)
G-CHJJ	Medway Clipper 100	210712	Cancelled as Destroyed (Crashed landing at Old Park Farm, Margam, Glamorgan 26.08.24)
G-CHNS	AgustaWestland AW139	31465	To Nigeria
G-CIHH	AutoGyro MTOSport	RSUK/MTOS/057	Cancelled as Destroyed (crashed at Perth, Perth & Kinross 12.02.25)
G-CMEJ	Van's RV-8	83330	Re-registered as G-PWII
G-CMSY	Bell 505 JetRanger X	65507	Re-registered as G-XDCB
G-CMXA	Airbus MBB BK 117D-3	21317	To Ministry of Defence as Jupiter HC2 ZZ145
G-CMXY	Bell 206B JetRanger III	1611	To USA
G-CSEE	Kubicek BB20ED	1405	To Malaysia
G-DEDK	Schleicher K7 Rhönadler	791	Cancelled by CAA (CofA expired 28.08.23, was based in Cyprus)
G-EETG	Cessna 172Q	172-75928	To Denmark
G-EPYW	Piper PA-28-181 Cherokee Archer II	28-7790557	Cancelled as Destroyed (Badly damaged when it overran and landed just outside the airport at Rochester, Kent 14.08.24)
G-FRDM	Boeing B75N1 Kaydet	75-2610	To USA as N87AL
G-HAGI	Boeing 737-8	42828	To Bulgaria as LZ-DDB
G-HYND	Robinson R44 Raven	2433	Cancelled as Permanently WFU (Rolled over on take-off from Cotswold, Gloucestershire 18.12.24)
G-IICP	Hughes 369E	0512E	To USA as N93MD
G-JLCA	Piper PA-34-200T Seneca II	34-7870428	To USA as N234FY
G-LULU	Grob G109	6137	Cancelled by CAA (CofA expired 31.08.22, was based in Belgium)
G-MDTC	Airbus Helicopters AS350B2 Ecureuil II	8172	To Norway
G-MNTK	CFM Shadow Srs CD	024	Cancelled by CAA (Permit to Fly expired 17.08.14)
G-MVEV	Mainair Gemini Flash IIA	687-888-6-W477	Cancelled by CAA (Permit to Fly expired 08.07.01)
G-MVLT	Aerial Arts Chaser S	CH.774	Cancelled by CAA (Permit to Fly expired 19.07.05)
G-MWSM	Mainair Gemini Flash IIA	836-0491-7-W630	Cancelled as Permanently WFU (Permit to Fly expired 01.12.24)
G-MYMJ	Medway Raven X	MRB004/110	Cancelled as Permanently WFU (Permit to Fly expired 18.05.21)
G-MYTK	Mainair Mercury	1009-1094-7-W805	Cancelled by CAA (Permit to Fly expired 19.04.14)
G-NSEY	Embraer 195	19000671	To Serbia as YU-ATC
G-OFCM	Reims Cessna F172L	0839	To Republic of Ireland as EI-AFX
G-OMUD	Cessna A185E Skywagon	185-01996	To Guernsey as 2-MMWD
G-OPUL	Learjet 45	45-163	Re-registered as G-OJJP
G-OSJC	Piper PA-32R-301 Saratoga II SP	3246193 Re-registered as G-OSJT	
G-OXOM	Piper PA-28-161 Cadet	2841285	To USA
G-POGO	Flight Design CT2K	01-06-02-12	Cancelled as Destroyed (details unknown)
G-PPFS	Reims Cessna FRA150L Aerobat	0126	Cancelled by CAA (Crashed near Thorganby, North Yorkshire 20-07-24)
G-RCHL	P & M Aviation Quik GT450	8592	To Spain
G-RFGB	Fournier RF6B-100	LAA 410-15594	Cancelled by CAA (No Permit to Fly issued, believed not completed)
G-RVDX	Van's RV-4	926	To Italy
G-SAMY	Europa Aviation Europa XS	PFA 247-12901	Cancelled by CAA (Permit to Fly expired 24.10.24, details unknown)
G-USHA	Learjet 45	45-535	To Guernsey a 2-ONEL
G-WARO	Piper PA-28-161 Warrior III	2842015	To USA
G-WARU	Piper PA-28-161 Warrior III	2842023	To USA
G-WASC	Eurocopter Deutschland EC1135 T2+	1074	Re-registered as G-PSCA
G-WKTP	Beech B300 King Air 350	FL-203	To Guernsey as 2-WKTP
EI-BUN	Beech 76 Duchess	ME-371	To France
EI-DGU	Airbus A300B4-622R	557	To Germany as D-AZMQ
EI-DTH	Airbus A320-216	3956	To Lithuania
EI-DTI	Airbus A320-216	3976	To Guernsey as 2-IDTI
EI-DTJ	Airbus A320-216	3956	To Guernsey as 2-IDTJ
EI-FPD	Bombardier CRJ-900	15401	To USA as N637NN
EI-HBA	Bombardier CRJ-1000	19020	To Spain as EC-LOX
EI-HNS	Airbus A320-214	6150	To Romania as YR-AGD
EI-HPE	Airbus A321-271NX	8557	To Peoples Republic of China as B-32M0
EI-HRA	Boeing 737-8BK(BCF)	33023	To United Arab Emirates as A6-SHO
EI-LKC	Airbus A330-243F	1688	To Hong Kong Special Administrative area of the People's Republic of China as B-LKB
M-ABTR	Boeing 737-8Q8	30674	Cancelled as Dismantled (to Castellon-Costa Azahar, Spain 15.03.25 for parting out)
M-MTOO	Bombardier Challenger 300	20050	To USA as N350CX
M-OLTT	Pilatus PC-12/47E	1063	To Canada as C-GMRX
2-HAIB	ATR-42-500	637	To Kenya as 5Y-RNV
2-KCRF	Boeing 737-86N	36812	To USA as N238HR
2-SALA	Piper PA-32-300 Six	32-7940106	To United Kingdom as G-SALA
2-SILK	Dassault Falcon 2000S	744	To Vietnam

Key: NB – Nominal Base. A place name in brackets relates to the owner's address, as where the aircraft is based is unknown.

Updates & Corrections

Reg'n	Details
G-BRSA	Became F-HPHS (NB cancelled 11.07.18 to Italy but no I- marks known.
G-BWOY	Became OK-2111 11.05.24
G-BYSE	Became T7-DHR
G-CETN	Type changed to a Hummelbird (modified) 03.04.25
G-CKTV	Became I-CKTV
G-CLVH	Became ZS-YBD 02.25
G-CMMF	Became ZU-ROI
G-CMWR	Became PR-PBH
G-DFKI	Became ZU-RBZ
G-EROL	Became YU-MNE 30.04.25
G-IVIP	Became AP-BOH 25.03.24
G-IZOB	Became SE-JKN
G-LADD	Became F-HMHM 31.03.25
G-LLCH	Became N845Z 15.04.25
G-MREL	Manufacturer changed to AutoGyro Certification Ltd 27.03.25
G-SRBM	Became ZS-DYA 13.11.24
2-BOTS	Became V5-ABQ 09.24
2-CALC	Became ZS-SZG
2-ISSW	Became D-HNHG 02.23
2-TSPP	Became PK-MGI 26.03.25

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MILITARY MOVEMENTS

Ben Stanley Hall showcases the rich diversity of aircraft movements up and down the UK

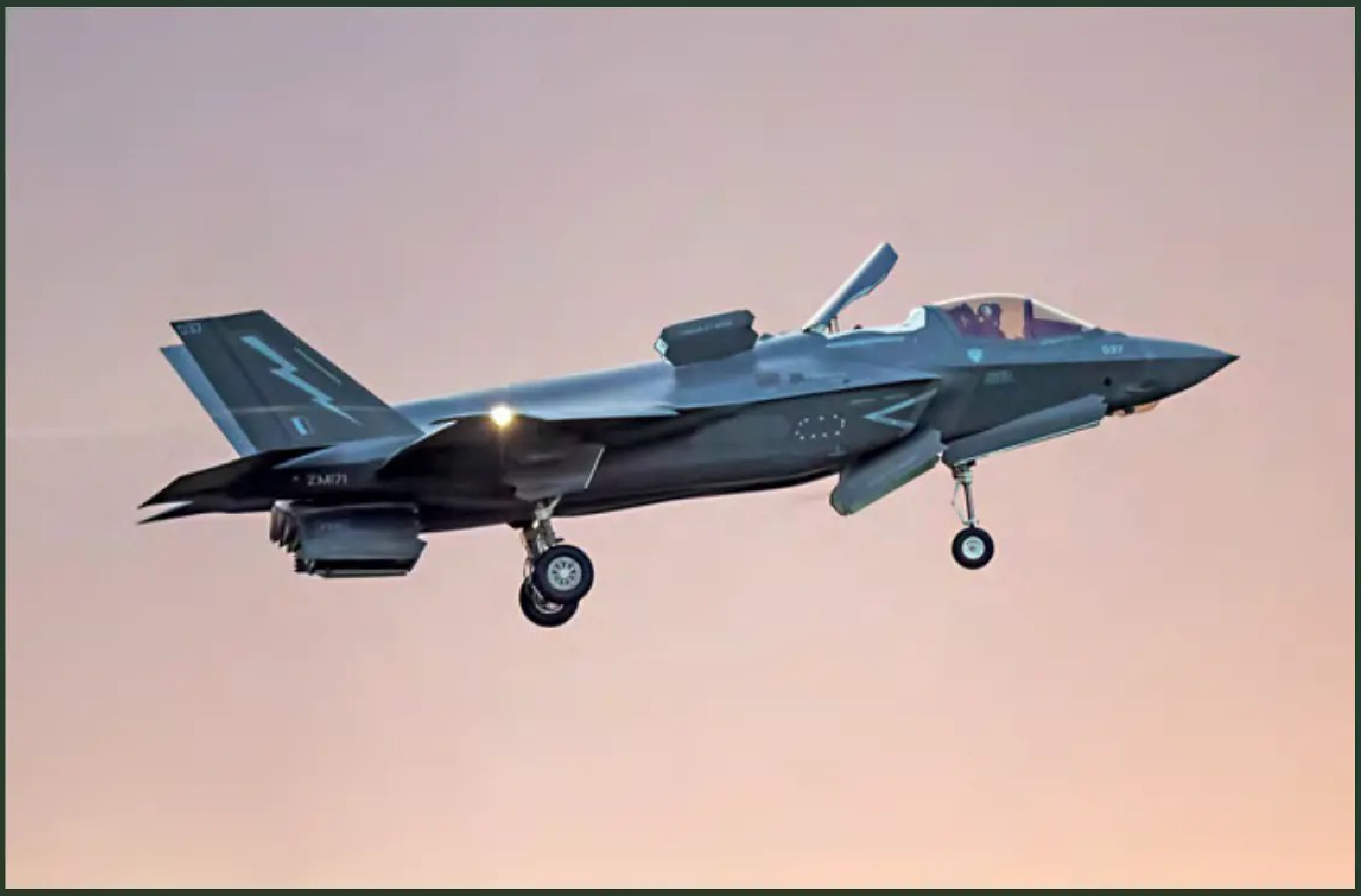
This month's movements are headed by the leader of the free world, if you believe the 47th President of the United States can be so described, hailing from where President Trump was transiting from an E-3 and A330MRTT from the Royal Saudi Air Force en route to the USA.

We welcome contributions from readers across the world. If you photograph an aircraft that is not in its usual location or could be of interest, please email your images, without watermarks, to ben.hall@keypublishing.com using the subject heading 'Just Passing Through', with a short caption including as much information as possible. AN

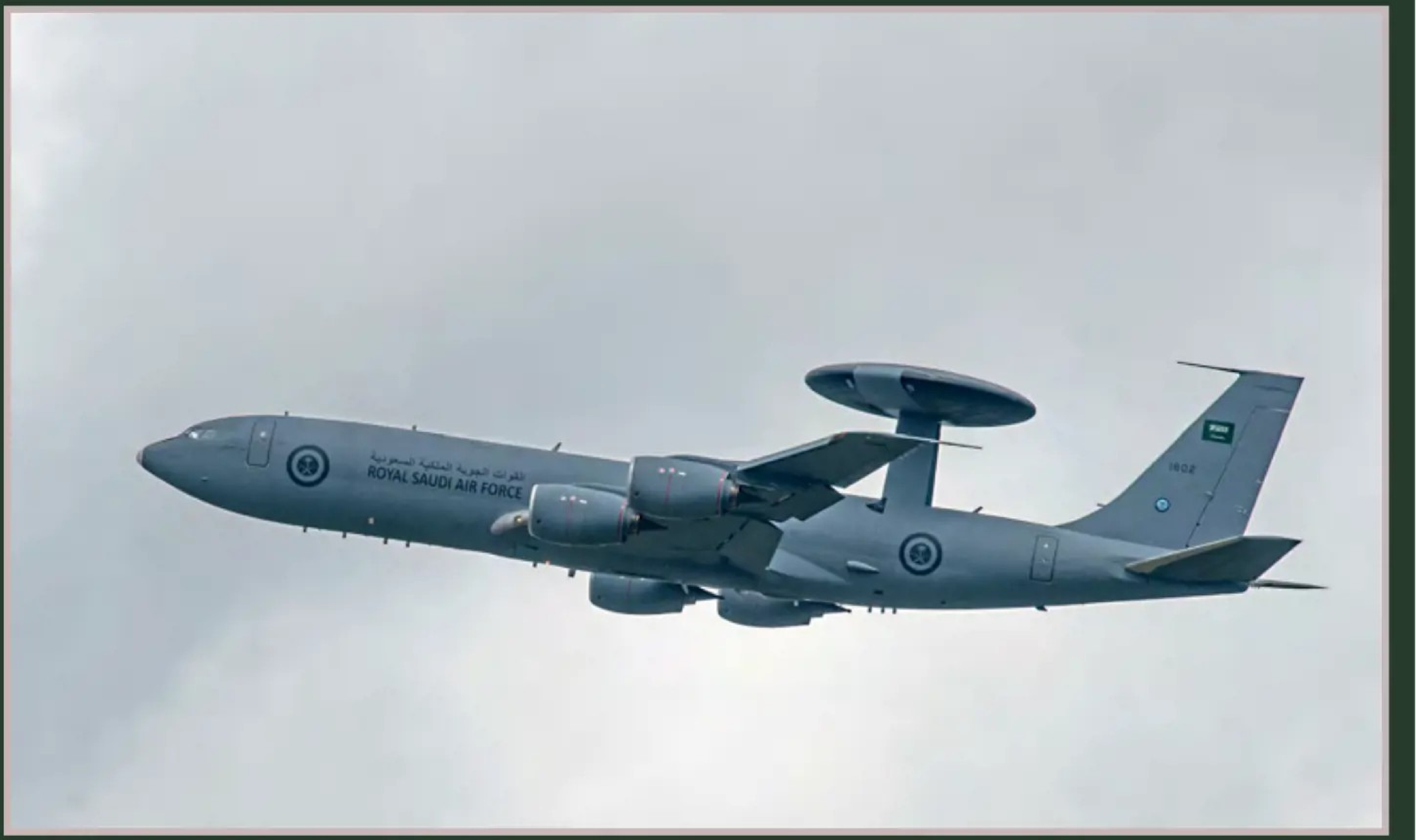
VC-25A, 92-9000, utilising the callsign Air Force One, is seen departing RAF Mildenhall on the evening of May 15 enroute to Joint Base Andrews after a fuel stop. The aircraft was on the ground for approximately 90 minutes. President Donald Trump was returning from his tour of the Middle East, which included visits to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE. Mark Lynham

▲ Royal Canadian Air Force CP-140 Aurora, 140113, about to touch down at Prestwick's Runway 30 for an overnight stay on May 30, arriving from CFB Greenwood as CFC491 Rolf Jonsen

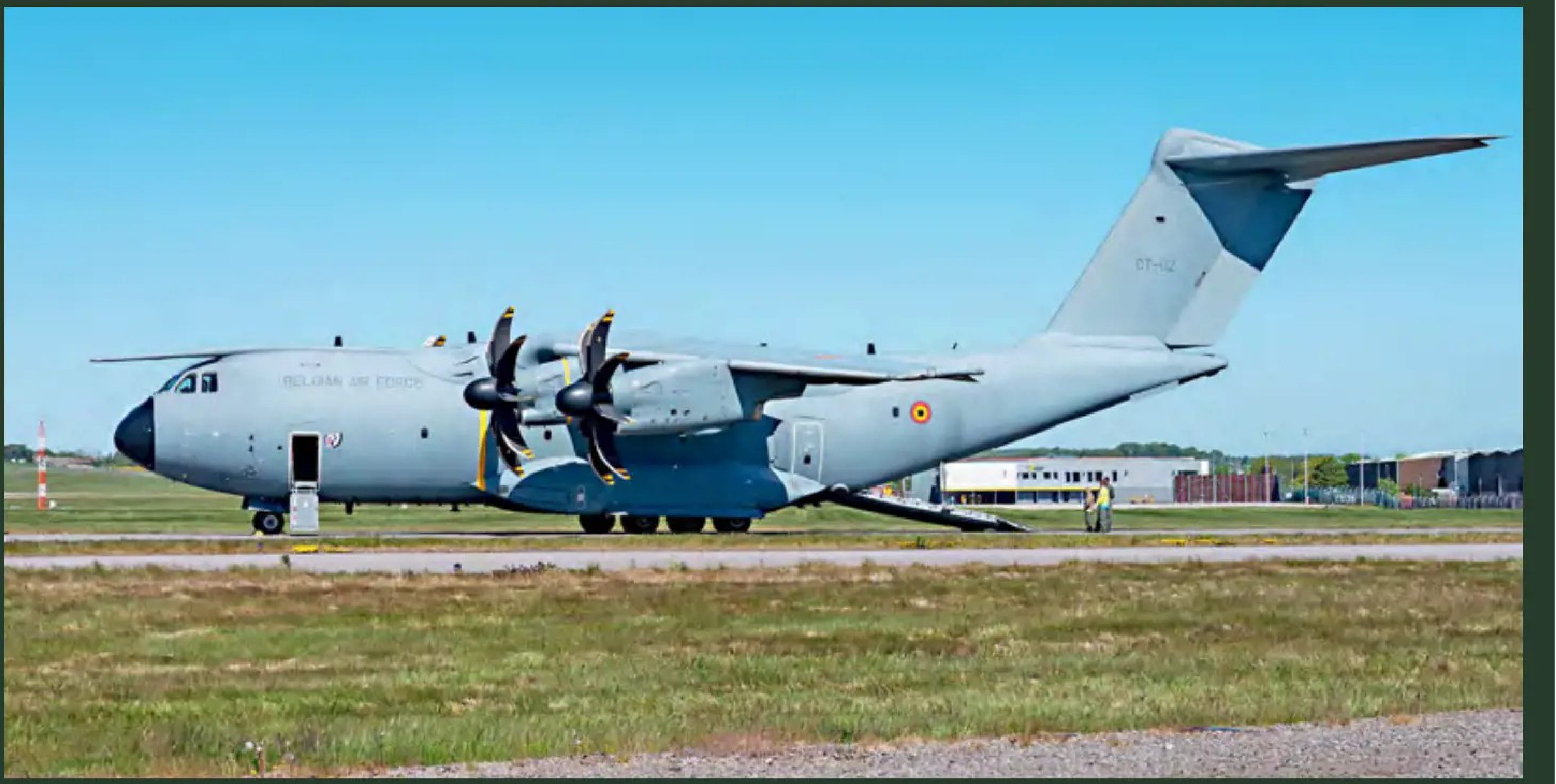
French Navy NH90, 16, parked at the Royal Pan at Glasgow, departed VFR westbound as French Navy 5396 after three hours on the ground Rolf Jonsen



◀ Scheduled to arrive at RAF Marham on May 2, were the latest two F-35B Lightning IIs, ZM171 and ZM172, having made the crossing in company of ZM144 and ZM145 returning from planned depot maintenance at MCAS Cherry Point as RRR9701 – 9704. The jets were accompanied on the crossing by A332 Voyager ZZ330 operating as RRR9301. Peter R Foster



▲ Royal Saudi Air Force E-3A Sentry, 1802, belonging to 18 Squadron, arrived at RAF Mildenhall using the callsign RSF9005. It flew in on May 26 and departed on May 28 to Bangor, Maine, with RSF9006, A330MRTT, 2402, departing from East Midlands Airport as tanker support Peter R Foster



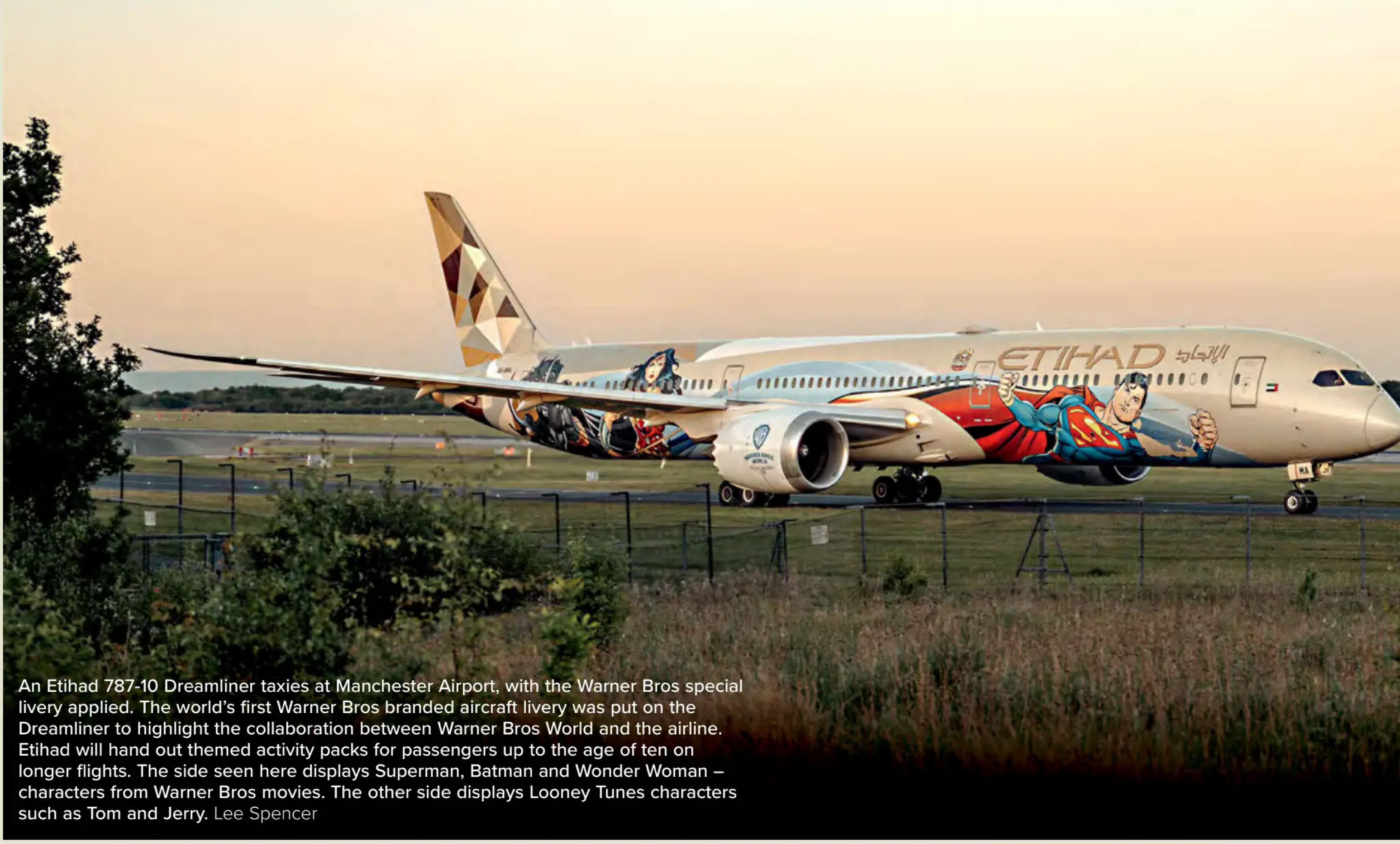
▲ Four examples of the Belgian Air Force A400M have recently visited Aberdeen in support of Exercise Red Condor, specifically aimed at operational preparation for the Belgian 3rd Parachute Battalion. The most recent visit, CT-02, is believed to have been a medical repatriation flight after a live firing incident injured three soldiers Kyle McKinlay

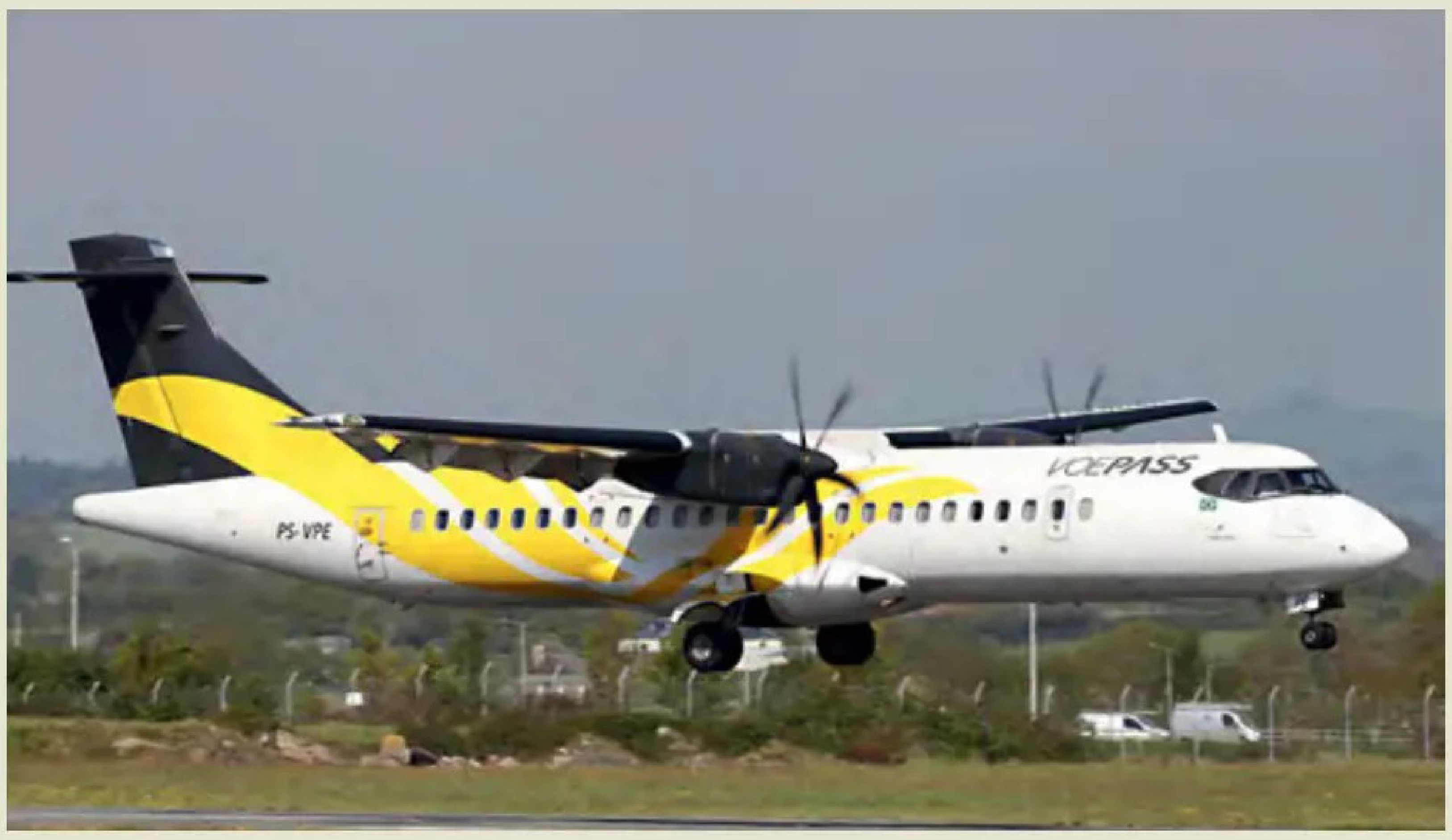
CIVILIAN MOVEMENTS

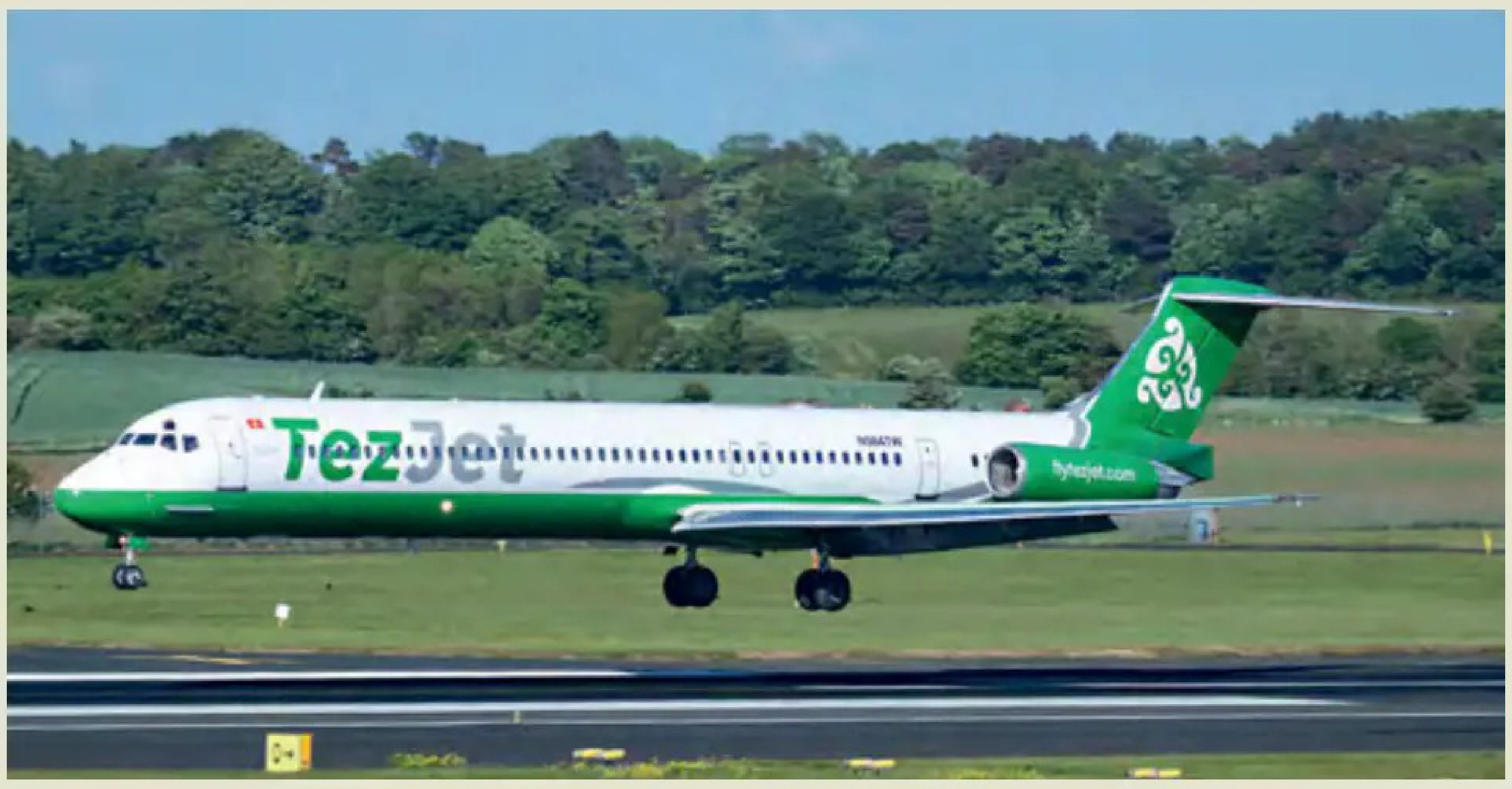
Ben Stanley Hall showcases the rich diversity of aircraft movements up and down the UK

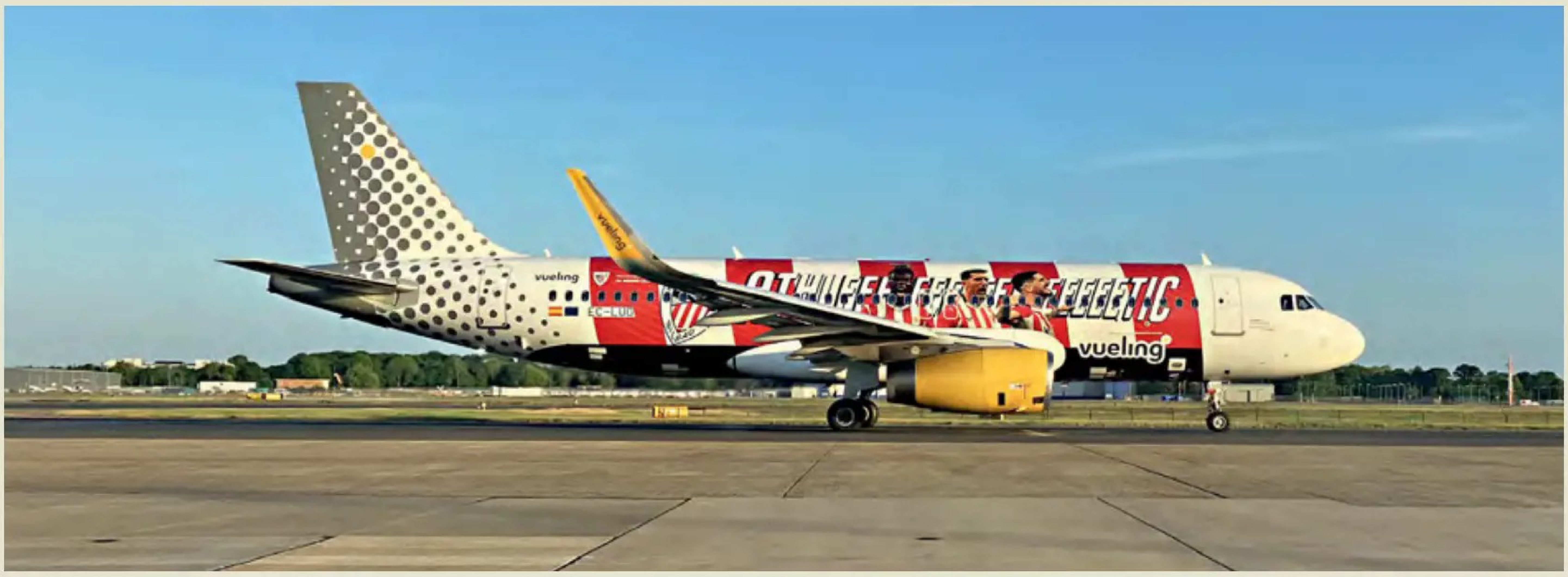
This month's *Civilian Movements* brings a range of aircraft types, and one all-electric movement – I think that may be a 'first' for us. Thank you to our contributors for some particularly great photography.

We welcome contributions from readers across the world. If you photograph an aircraft that is not in its usual location or could be of interest, please email your images, without watermarks, to ben.hall@keypublishing.com using the subject heading 'Just Passing Through', with a short caption including as much information as possible. *AN*

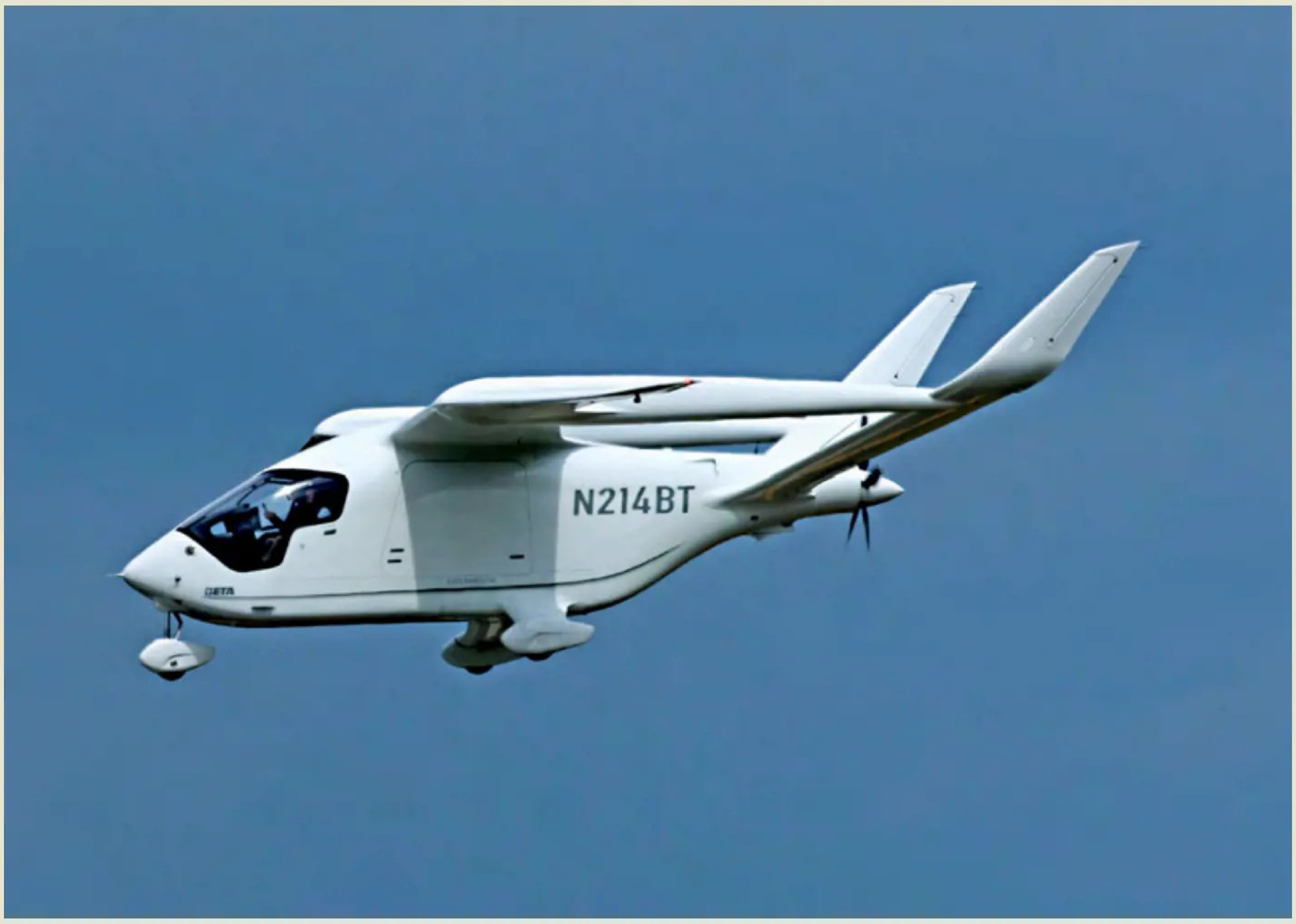

An Etihad 787-10 Dreamliner taxies at Manchester Airport, with the Warner Bros special livery applied. The world's first Warner Bros branded aircraft livery was put on the Dreamliner to highlight the collaboration between Warner Bros World and the airline. Etihad will hand out themed activity packs for passengers up to the age of ten on longer flights. The side seen here displays Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman – characters from Warner Bros movies. The other side displays Looney Tunes characters such as Tom and Jerry. Lee Spencer


▲ Captured on short final to Runway 08 at Exeter Airport was this ATR 72-600, PS-VPE (c/n 1116), belonging to Brazilian carrier Voepass Linhas Aéreas. The aircraft, which had started its life in 2013 with Avianca, had arrived from Brazil via Cape Verde and Porto to be handed back to its lessor. Ian Simpson

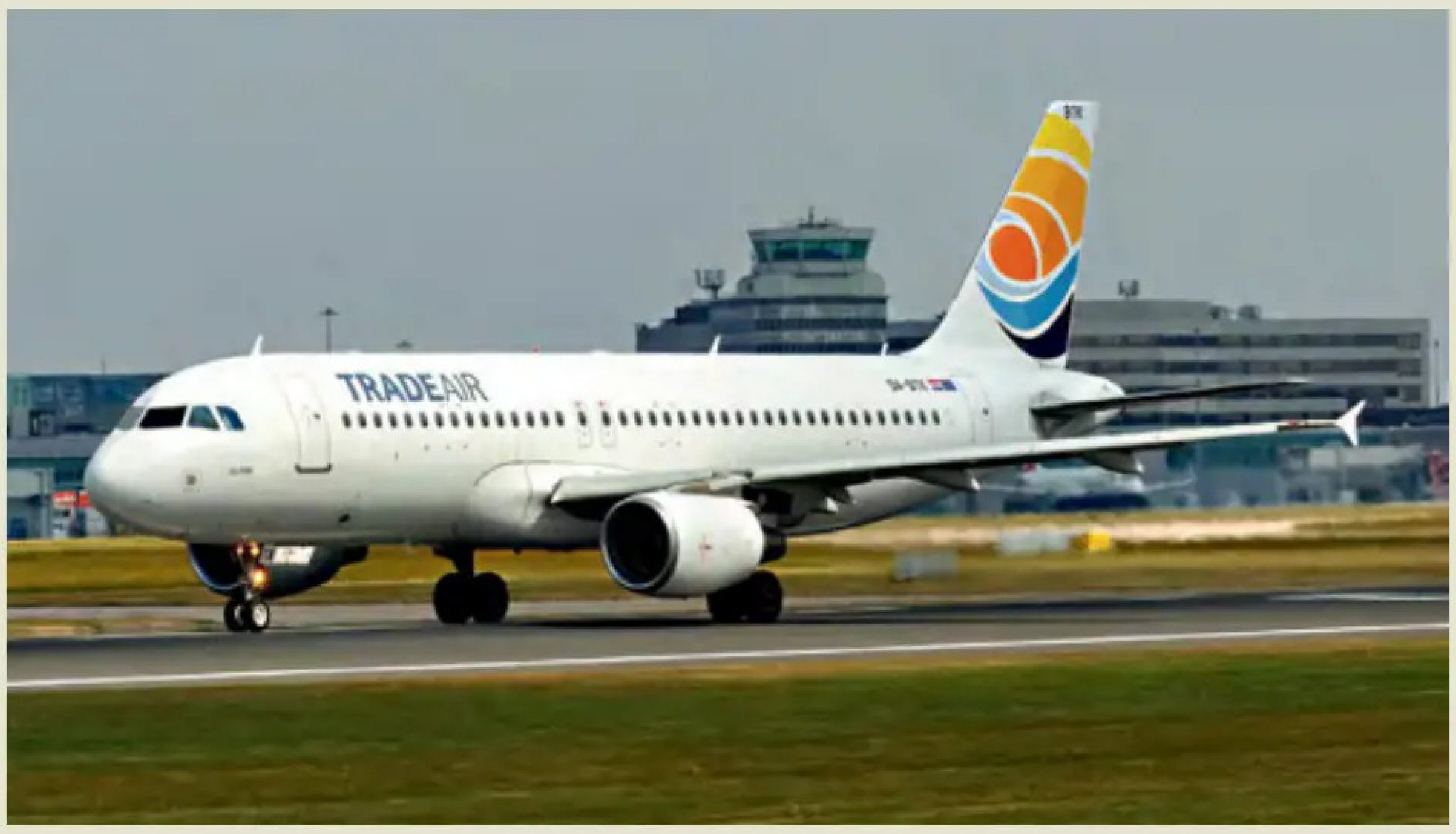

▲ This former TWA and American Airlines MD-83 was the last of the type to be produced in December 1999. The aircraft had been stored in Roswell, New Mexico, for more than five years. The aircraft is pictured landing at Prestwick on May 21 while on delivery to TezJet Airlines of Kyrgyzstan. Although the aircraft still wore its original registration number, N984TW (cn 53634), it is expected to be reregistered EX-80017 once it enters service. 'SH'



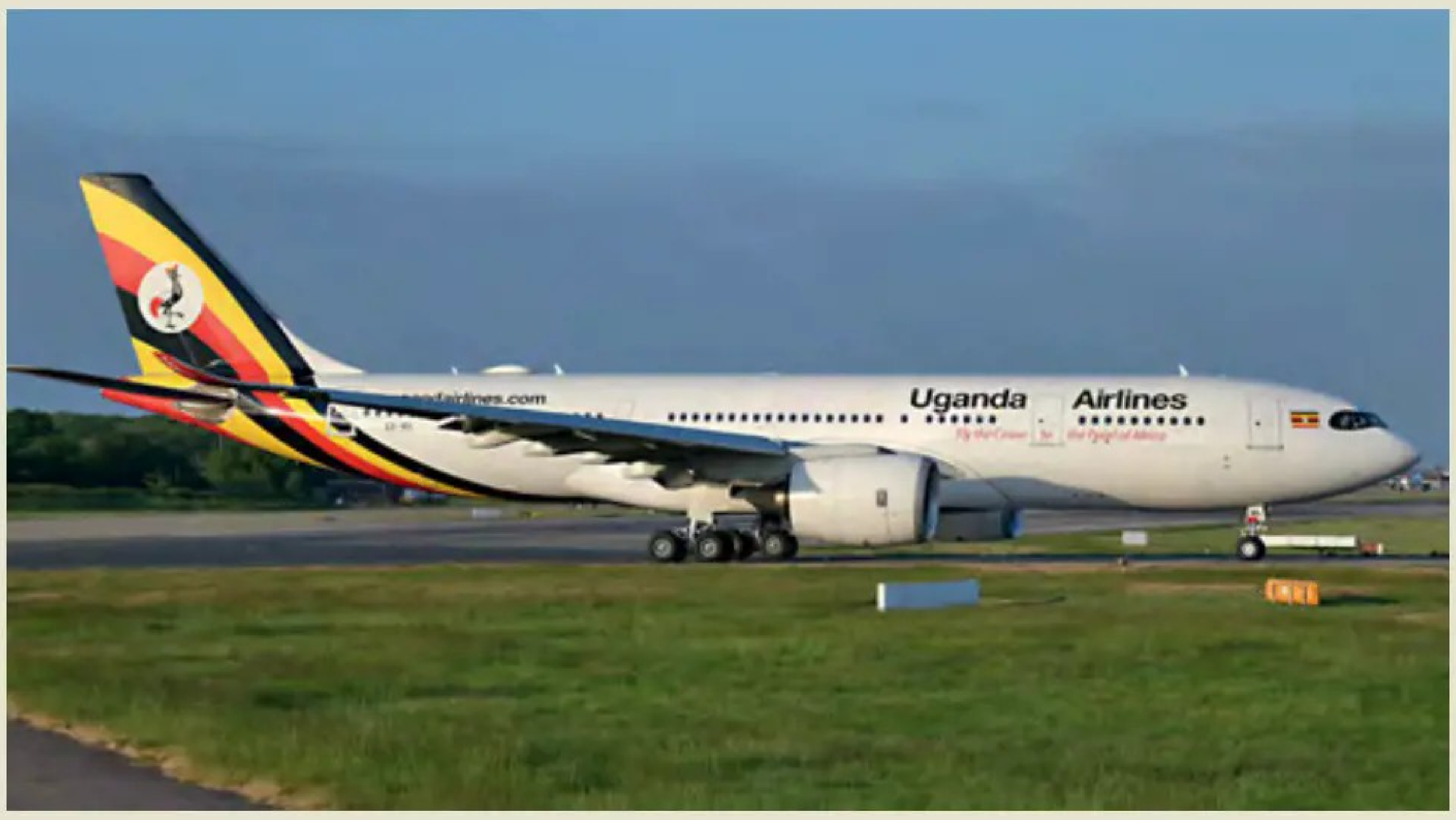
Vueling Airbus A320-232, EC-LUO (c/n 5530), arrived at London/Gatwick on May 18 wearing the special colours of football club Athletic Bilbao, one of six trips it made to the Sussex hub in the week before the Europa League final. The 12-year-old aircraft later returned to Bilbao as service VY7293, where the final was held on May 21 Key-Robert Veitch



It was not your run-of-the-mill arrival at Liverpool John Lennon airport on May 25, it was a movement for the history books. This is N214BT, a Beta Technologies CX-300, construction number BT31C-0002, and fully electric. N214BT arrived in Ireland the week prior by sea and was 'flown' from the ship to Shannon airport as an underslung load by a UH-1. After a week of test flights locally in the Shannon area, the aircraft flew up to Weston airport, just outside Dublin on May 24. N214BT is the first all-electric aircraft to land at Liverpool. The aircraft is in Europe on a tour. After Liverpool, it flew to Birmingham, Coventry and then Farnborough Airport. It eventually will end up in Norway for operational trials. John Spencer



This Airbus A320-214, 9A-BTK (c/n 2569), is operated by the Croatian passenger and cargo charter carrier Trade Air. Established in April 1994, the airline is based in Zagreb and has a fleet of four A320s and a single Saab 340. The aircraft was pictured at Manchester taking football fans to Bilbao. Martyn Cartledge



Uganda Airlines A330 5X-NIL 841 saw inaugural service from Gatwick on May 18. Flight UGD111 flew to Entebbe International Airport. The new direct service will operate four times weekly: Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, with same day return departures from London. Paul Convey/ Livin It Richard Vandervord

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We visit the soon to be history, Polish Air force Su-22 *Fitter* fleet

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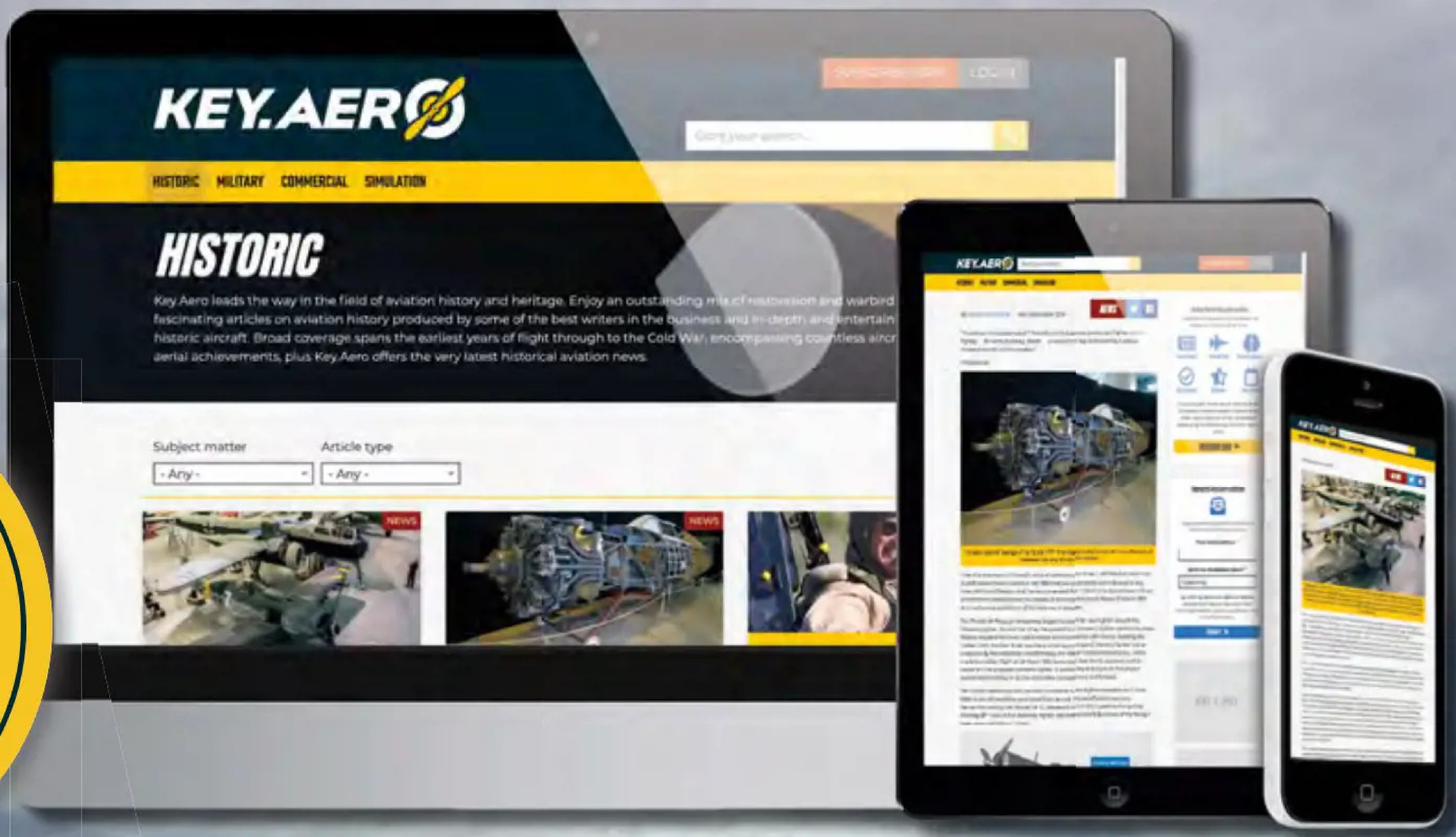

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